

Subject: The Rocky Road of Life: Growing Faith Through Trials

Dear Church Family,

I hope this message finds you walking closely with the Lord and encouraged in your faith journey. For those interest in devotions, studies, and other discipleship materials, they are available [[HERE](#)].

**Summary:** This week's sermon explored 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5, examining how our faith can grow exceedingly even in the midst of life's hardest trials. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians reminds us that persecution and tribulation are not obstacles to spiritual growth—they are opportunities for our faith to deepen and mature. The Thessalonians demonstrated that true faith isn't measured by theological eloquence or community service alone, but by patiently living out Biblical love and maintaining unity even under relentless pressure. This has profound implications for our spiritual lives: we are not defined by our difficulties unless we choose to be. With Christ at the helm of our hearts, we can glory in tribulations, knowing they produce perseverance, character, and hope.

**Takeaways:**

1. Our faith can grow "exceedingly," not just incrementally. God has laid out a banquet table for our spiritual growth through pleasing Him, obeying Him, enduring trials with joy, receiving His promises, rejecting worldly values, being doers of the Word, prayer, fellowship, and abiding in Christ through the Holy Spirit's work.
2. The evidence of exceedingly growing faith is demonstrated through patient, Biblical love toward one another in the church family, especially during persecution. The Thessalonians' love "abounded toward each other" even as they faced ongoing, inescapable pressures—this is the fruit of genuine faith.
3. We can "count it all joy" when we face trials because tribulation produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. Our entrance into the kingdom of God is not earned through suffering or good works, but exclusively by being born again as children of the living God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Christian, as we navigate the rocky roads of our own lives this week, let us remember that every trial is an opportunity for our faith to grow exceedingly. Every day we face the choice of which road to take...the one leading us deeper with Christ or the one leading us away from His protective covering, blessings, and presence.

In His Grace, Pastor Jim

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# The 'Y' in the Rocky Road of Life

## 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

### I. Introduction:

1. As we move into Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, be reminded it was written soon after the first, with both about 20 years after Christ had left the world. **While not without some needed correction, this young church is on fire for Jesus as they are expectant of His imminent return.**
2. The overall tone of this letter involves encouragement and comfort, along with correction...all of which are instructional for us today. **Comparisons of major eschatological OR end-times event differences between 1 and 2 Thessalonians are quite helpful as we dig deeper into Paul's purposes for this second letter.** Please note that we will spend some time considering the antichrist here in 2 Thessalonians as Paul makes his presence during the Day of the Lord quite prominent.

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Check out the comparative summary on the screen...**While the day of the Lord is mentioned in both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, the emphasis of Paul's first letter leans toward the rapture.** Correspondingly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter leans toward addressing the day of the Lord as we will read in our opening passage today.

<b>1 Thessalonians (Rapture)</b>	<b>2 Thessalonians (The Day of the Lord)</b>
Christ returns in the air	Christ returns to earth
Christ comes secretly FOR the church	Christ comes openly WITH the Church
Believers taken before the tribulation	Unbelievers will experience the tribulation and the great white throne room of judgment
The timing of the rapture is unknown	The time of the things within Day of the Lord are largely known

Adapted from: The Bible Exposition Commentary by Warren Wiersbe

3. A reminder that the Day of the Lord is not a specific day, but a specific period. *While many will point to the closing of the tribulation period as the highlight*, I believe the bible presents this day as beginning with the start of the tribulation, going through the tribulation, the 1,000 literal reign of Christ, and the final judgment against Satan and those standing with him, all the way to our populating the new heaven and earth.

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## II. 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2: The Power of a Greeting

1. I often wonder why we have largely lost the power of the greeting in our culture...especially after I consider the Apostle Paul's greetings. *Here in 2 Thessalonians, Paul again turns a greeting into a powerful message of encouragement, wonder, and life-transforming truth.*
  - A. First up, while in our power and for our glory, we can DO churchy (is that a word?) things, the church can only BE His bride and His ambassador IN the power, will, and purposes of God Himself. *In this we are reminded that 'less of me and more of He' should be the continual refrain of our hearts and minds.*
  - B. Next, from salvation to sanctification, every good gift come to us through the grace of God. *In His grace, God forgives, justifies, and saves.* In His grace, He builds our faith, gives spiritual gifts, and empowers us. *In His grace, He gives and fulfills His promises.* In His grace, He sent His Son to die for us that we may spend all eternity in relationship with Him.
  - C. Third, also in grace, we may live lives of peace with God. *In what is yet another miracle of God, our hearts war against Him NO MORE!*

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## III. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5: Setting Your Sights to the Proper Height

1. As I read these verses, some wonderfully impossible pictures came to mind. *People of all ages, heritages, and socio-economic*

groups...people from all nations, tribes, and tongues equal at the foot of the cross...people coming to faith in Christ and people maturing in the faith in Christ. Story after story, and everyone has one, of a life filled with hurt and hopes...some of these stories though also have the reality of Christ's gift of new, eternal life. So we celebrate when someone declares their faith...we celebrate when they get baptized, when they serve, and when they grow.

A. Why, you might ask? Because our hearts and the world lead us away from God, not toward Him. Because, the believer knows that those coming to faith and living out their faith have received the gifts of love, truth, and real freedom among the many blessings of God. Because our heart and strength no longer delude us into thinking we don't need God, but confess of our desperate need for Him.

So, we rejoice and rightly thank God.

2. But, we see the Thessalonian's faith did not simply grow – itself worth our praising and thanking God – but it grew exceedingly. This is a whole different thing...the former is settling for a nice, nutritious meal when King Jesus has laid out a glorious banquet table for your faith to grow exceedingly?!
3. Now, don't get me wrong, it is beyond wonderful when your faith grows even a little. Yet, that the Thessalonians faith grew exceedingly tells us, that too is available for us. So, I pray you are greatly encouraged, even inspired, as we take a few minutes in setting our eyes higher...that we may have God-sized vision and not itty-bitty man-sized vision for how our faith may grow exceedingly:

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- A. Pleasing God (He 11:4, 5, 6);
- B. Fearing God (Heb 11:7)
- C. Obeying God (Heb 11:8);

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- D. Enduring (through trials, testings, persecution, and suffering) in God's will, strength, and purposes (He 11:9-11; James 1:2-4);

Ro 5:3-5; 1 Pet 1:6-7) and having joy as we do so (James 1:2-3);

E. Knowing and receiving God's promises (He 11:13) as this gives us the hope of the glory of God in our lives for we are at peace with Him (Ro 5:1-2);

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F. Rejecting the world and not fearing man (He 11:24, 27);

G. Hearing/receiving the word of God (Ro 10:17; Col 2:6-7);

H. Being doers of the word (James 1:22-24, 2:26) THIS ONE TIES TO OBEDIENCE ABOVE;

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I. Prayer and dependence on God. Trusting in His strength, wisdom, and character and NOT our own. (Mk 11:24; Jude 1:20);

J. Fellowship (He 10:24-25; Our passage today 2 Thes 1:3);

K. The halo effect...abiding in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit (Jn 15:5; Gal 5:22-23- Eph 3:16-17);

4. In vs 3-4, Paul reveals how he knows their *faith* is growing exceedingly. It is NOT by their great oration of theology or their great community service. It's NOT by their power, wisdom, or self-righteousness. No, their faith is growing exceedingly by their *patiently* living out *Biblical love* in the unity of the Spirit in their church family ('abounds toward each other' in v3) even in the persecutions and tribulations they endure as we read in v4.

A. In this, Paul opens a pandora's box...how can one have patience (meaning endurance or perseverance) and faith in the midst of persecution? Thanks for asking...btw, the words for afflictions and tribulations here speak of NOT a once and done trial, but an ongoing series of relentless, inescapable pressures being brought to bear – that is, this was full-on warfare against God and, by extension, His children – life difficulties are real, relentless, and ever-present on this side of heaven.

B. For most, in one form or another of difficulties, our normal bent is to fight back and overcome, OR if the cost is too great to fight back, we will flee rather than face the hardships and turmoil.

Yet, Paul's emphasis here is that we can't and don't need to go it alone...indeed, Paul reminded them in his greeting that they have supernatural power in God. AND if we sneak a peek to v5, we read that **IN** Christ they have been counted worthy of the kingdom of God even as the riches of their exceedingly growing faith draw them deeper still with Christ – wow!

5. As those coming to our Weds evening study in Job can testify, God has much to teach us regarding how our faith can not only endure but mature through the trials, tribulations, and warfare of this life. For our purposes today, open your bible to Romans 5:3-5 and then we will look at James 1:2-4.

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- A. <sup>3</sup> And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. - Romans 5:3–5

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- B. <sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. - James 1:2–4

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The central takeaway in these verses, while many times hard for us to accept, is that while tribulations and trials are sure, we can glory and count it all as joy...*what's more, in the midst of the hard things of life we can have a faith that grows exceedingly*. Why? Because we have Christ and with our identity in Him, we win. *We are not defined by our difficulties unless we choose to be!* **Indeed, we grow exceedingly through our life trials, for with Christ at the helm of our hearts we are more than conquerors!**

Oh, worldly philosophies and religions say we aren't victorious outside of their own anti-Jesus definitions denying Jesus grace, forgiveness, and transforming love in favor of man power and control. *Even our own hearts envy for that which we don't have in*

horizontal comforts, wealth, and power. In response, let's close out by looking back in our passage again; this time at v5.

“which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.”

Their love, patience, and faith in Christ, even in the hardest of trials, tribulations, and sorrows was setting them aside by God for God (the very definition of holiness I might add). It's important to note that Paul is not so much reporting the past, but pointing to their present and future. His words are meant to help them grow exceedingly as they persevere in their trials as Paul points to two truths (worthy of heaven and avoiding hell) we will get to after addressing a couple of other important points.

A. First, I want to draw your attention to what seems a subtle difference, but is actually monumental for it is the difference between our being at the center or Jesus being our point of focus...it is the difference between living for ourselves and trusting in anything/anyone that gets us what we think is right or living for Christ and our future with His sovereign care. Specifically, Paul is not thankful for their faithfulness in the difficulties of this life, but in their faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ 'for which they suffered'.

It's important to note that persecution was not an entrance exam for heaven. They/We simply cannot earn our way there! This persecution is, in a sense, fruit of having given their lives to Christ; that is, the clear evidence of their everyday lived experiences indicates they lived for the glory of God AND THE WORLD HATES THIS (Mt 10:22).

B. Second, Paul unequivocally points to God, and His judgment as being righteous. Much of mankind has trouble with this...especially in the midst of suffering that challenges our own preferences, bias', and conceptions of right and wrong. Indeed, it is likely that some form of “why would a good God

allow \_\_\_\_\_” is the biggest stumbling block people often point to in keeping them from believing in Christ.

- C. Now we return to the two correlating truths...that of heaven and hell. They are real with (1) heaven being the permanent home for those receiving Jesus as Lord and (2) hell being the permanent home for those waring against God.

While both require a degree of faith, and without diminishing the faith we need to believe in Christ (a faith that Christ Himself gives us), I believe the evidence of Christ and the Bible to be so overwhelmingly true that it would take far more faith than I have to believe that evil will win and that Satan is the King of kings. Satan was, is, and will be an eternal fool and loser for only Christ is King. What is also true is that God will righteously judge all.

- D. This brings us full circle back to their being “counted worthy of the kingdom of God”. With their faith growing exceedingly, Paul is offering a great contrast of eternity in heaven verses eternity in hell. While these words of ‘being worthy of heaven’ are encouraging, how is this possible?

The answer is found in the book of John. In chapter 3, we read of the story of Nicodemus, a highly respected Pharisee, being presented the Gospel by Jesus Himself. While I will leave you to read and study this incredible account between Jesus and Nicodemus, the bottom line is that to enter the kingdom of God, we must be born again...in the Spirit of God. So, as with the Thessalonians, our entrance into the kingdom of God is not by our power, might, deeds, thoughts, position, or any other factor of ‘me’, but it is exclusively by birthright...you only get to heaven by being a child of the living God.

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With that, I want to invite you consider where you are on the sometimes rocky road of life...The road leading closer to Christ or the road leading you away? Continue...[The Romans Road – Children’s Ministry, Invitation & Prayer]

## **2 Thessalonians 1:1-5**

### **Staying on Course**

### **Part 2 of Values, Virtues, & Victory**

#### **I. Introduction: Intro to the Book**

- 1 Thess emphasizes the rapture while 2 Thess emphasizes the Day of the Lord.

#### **II. 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2: The Power of a Greeting**

- Take a moment to deeply consider God's grace.

#### **III. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5: Setting Your Sights to the Proper Height**

- Everyone has a story
- 11 ways we can grow our faith exceedingly
- The summary of the 11 ways is found in our patiently living our Biblical love in the unity of the Spirit
- There is one way to be found worthy of the kingdom of God

Additional Scripture References: Ro 5:3-5; James 1:2-4

## **5-Day Devotional**

### **2 Thessalonians 1:1-5**

### **The 'Y' in The Rocky Road of Life**

#### **Day 1: The Power of Grace in Our Greeting**

**Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2; Ephesians 2:8-10**

Devotional: Every good gift flows from God's grace—our salvation, our spiritual gifts, our very ability to approach Him. Paul's greeting reminds us that the church exists not by human effort but "in God our Father."

Today, reflect on this truth: grace isn't just your entry point into faith; it's the ongoing fuel for your spiritual journey. God's grace forgives, justifies, empowers, and transforms. It brings peace where war once raged in our hearts. Ask yourself: Am I trying to earn what God freely gives? Or am I receiving with open hands all that He wants to pour into my life? Let "less of me, more of He" become your heart's refrain today.

#### **Day 2: Faith That Grows Exceedingly**

**Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Colossians 2:6-7; Romans 10:17**

Devotional: God doesn't call us to settle for modest spiritual growth when He's prepared a banquet table for our faith to flourish exceedingly. The Thessalonians' faith didn't just grow—it grew abundantly through hearing God's Word, obeying His commands, and walking in fellowship. Faith expands when we please God rather than people, when we endure trials with joy, and when we trust His promises over our circumstances.

Today, set your sights higher than "good enough" Christianity. What would exceedingly growing faith look like in your life? Commit to one practice that feeds your faith: deeper Bible study, consistent prayer, or authentic Christian community. God has more for you than you've yet imagined.

#### **Day 3: Love in the Midst of Tribulation**

**Reading: 2 Thes 1:3-4; Ro 5:3-5**

Devotional: The evidence of the Thessalonians' exceedingly growing faith wasn't theological eloquence or impressive ministry programs—it was their love for one another amid relentless persecution. They demonstrated patience and faith while enduring ongoing pressures and trials. This reveals a profound truth: our character is forged not in comfort but in tribulation.

Trials produce perseverance, perseverance builds character, and character generates hope that never disappoints. You're not defined by your difficulties unless you choose to be. With Christ, you grow through what you go through. What trial are you facing today?

Instead of asking God to remove it, ask Him what He wants to develop in you through it. Let love abound even when circumstances press hard.

#### **Day 4: Counted Worthy Through Christ**

**Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:5; John 3:1-16; Romans 8:16-17**

Devotional: We cannot earn our way into God's kingdom—worthiness comes only through being born again as children of God. The Thessalonians' faithfulness amid suffering was evidence, not the entrance exam. Their identity in Christ set them apart for God's purposes. This is the definition of holiness: being set aside by God for God.

Today, rest in this truth: your entrance into heaven isn't based on your performance but on your birthright as God's child through faith in Jesus. You are counted worthy not because of what you've done, but because of what Christ has done. Let this reality transform how you face today's challenges. You're already victorious in Him. Your identity is secure. Live from that place of confidence and peace.

#### **Day 5: Living for the Gospel**

**Reading: 2 Thes 1:4-5; James 1:2-4; Philippians 1:27-30**

**Devotional:** Paul wasn't merely thankful for the Thessalonians' endurance in difficulties—he celebrated their faithfulness to the Gospel "for which they suffered." Their persecution was fruit of having surrendered their lives to Christ, clear evidence they lived for God's glory rather than earthly comfort. This challenges our modern tendency to pursue a comfortable Christianity. Suffering for the Gospel isn't an entrance requirement for heaven, but it may be evidence that we're truly living for Christ in a world opposed to Him.

Today, examine your life: Are you living for Jesus or merely living with Jesus as an accessory? Count it all joy when trials come, knowing they're opportunities for your faith to mature. Let your everyday experiences point others to Christ's glory, regardless of the cost.

## **Small Group Study Guide**

### **2 Thessalonians 1:1-5**

### **The 'Y' in The Rocky Road of Life**

**Opening Prayer:** Pray that the Lord would open your eyes to see and understand His word as you discuss the sermon.

**Key Takeaways:** Query the group for takeaways first...you may stay with one or more of those.

1. The Church exists IN God's power, not our own - Our identity and effectiveness come from being rooted in God the Father and Jesus Christ.
2. Grace is the foundation of everything - From salvation to sanctification, every good gift comes through God's grace.
3. Faith can grow exceedingly - We're not meant to settle for minimal spiritual growth; God offers us a banquet table of faith development.
4. Trials produce spiritual maturity - Persecution and tribulation, when faced with Christ, develop perseverance, character, and hope.
5. We are counted worthy through Christ alone - Our entrance into God's kingdom is by birthright as His children, not by our own merit.

**Discussion Questions:** Did the Holy Spirit prompt any questions with you? Start with those.

1. Paul describes the church as being "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." What does it mean practically to be "in" God rather than just affiliated with a church?
2. The sermon asks, "Can we just want all that God wants to give us?" What might be holding you back from fully receiving God's grace in your life right now?
3. How does understanding that peace with God comes through grace (not our effort) change the way you approach your relationship with Him?
4. The Thessalonians' faith didn't just grow—it grew "exceedingly." Looking at the list from the sermon (pleasing God, obeying God, enduring trials, etc.), which area of faith growth do you feel God is calling you to focus on right now?

5. Paul knew their faith was growing not by their theology or service, but by their love for each other during persecution. Why is loving others in difficult times such a clear indicator of spiritual maturity?
6. The sermon mentions we often either "fight back and overcome" or "flee" when facing difficulties. What would a third option—enduring with faith in Christ—look like in a current challenge you're facing?
7. Both passages speak of finding joy and glory in tribulations. Be honest: How does this teaching sit with you emotionally? Is it difficult to accept? Why or why not?
8. The sermon states, "We are not defined by our difficulties unless we choose to be." What difficulties are you tempted to let define you? How can you shift your identity back to being "in Christ"?
9. Share an example from your life (or someone you know) where a trial clearly produced perseverance, character, or hope. What made the difference in that situation?
10. The Thessalonians were "counted worthy of the kingdom of God" not by earning it, but through their faith in Christ. How does this truth free you from performance-based Christianity?
11. The sermon contrasts heaven and hell as real destinations. How does keeping an eternal perspective help you endure present difficulties?
12. Paul points to God's "righteous judgment" even in the midst of suffering. How do you reconcile God's goodness with the reality of suffering in the world?

**Practical Applications:** Query the group for applications first...you may explore one or more of those.

1. Review the list of ways faith can grow exceedingly (from the sermon).
2. Identify your weakest area and one specific action you can take this week to strengthen it.
3. Share your choice with an accountability partner from the group.
4. When you face a difficulty this week (large or small), journal about it using this framework:
  - a. What is the trial?
  - b. How am I tempted to respond in my own strength?
  - c. What would trusting God look like in this situation?
  - d. What might God be developing in me through this?

5. Like the Thessalonians who showed love "toward each other" during persecution, identify someone in your church family going through a difficult time.
6. Reach out with practical help, encouragement, or prayer this week.
7. Each day this week, write down one specific way you experienced God's grace.
8. At the end of the week, thank God for His abundant gifts and ask Him to help you want all He wants to give you.

**Closing Prayer Points:**

- Share specific trials or tribulations group members are facing.
- Pray for exceedingly growing faith in the midst of difficulties.
- Pray for the grace to love one another well, especially during hard times.
- Thank God that we are counted worthy through Christ alone.

**Discussion Questions**  
**2 Thessalonians 1:1-5**  
**The 'Y' in The Rocky Road of Life**

1. How does the distinction between the Rapture and the Day of the Lord shape your understanding of end times events and your daily Christian walk?
2. In what practical ways can we pursue having our faith grow 'exceedingly' rather than settling for minimal spiritual growth?
3. Why do you think Paul emphasizes that the Thessalonians' faith was demonstrated through their love for one another during persecution rather than through theological knowledge or community service?
4. How can we genuinely count trials and tribulations as joy when our natural human response is to fight back or flee from difficulty?
5. What does it mean that we are set aside by God for God through our faithfulness in suffering, and how does this definition of holiness challenge modern Christianity?
6. Why is it significant that Paul thanks God for their faithfulness to the Gospel rather than simply their faithfulness in enduring difficulties?
7. How does understanding that every good gift comes through God's grace alone help us combat the tendency to rely on our own strength and accomplishments?
8. In what ways does viewing persecution as fruit of giving our lives to Christ rather than an entrance exam for heaven change our perspective on suffering?
9. How can the church today recover the power of greeting and encouragement that Paul demonstrates in his letters to build up believers?
10. What does it mean practically to have our identity defined by Christ and our victory in Him rather than by our circumstances and difficulties?

# **Dinner Conversation Starters**

## **2 Thessalonians 1:1-5**

### **The ‘Y’ in The Rocky Road of Life**

#### **1. Growing “Exceedingly” — Not Just a Little Bit**

Paul praised the Thessalonians because their faith was not just growing, it was “growing exceedingly.” In what ways do you think our faith as a family has grown in the past year? If “normal growth” is like a snack and “exceeding growth” is a banquet, what would a “banquet” of faith look like in our home? Is there one step we could each take this week to set our sights higher in trusting God?

#### **2. Trials, Tribulations, and How We Respond**

The sermon talked about how God uses trials (Romans 5:3–5; James 1:2–4) to produce perseverance, character, and hope. Can you think of a hard situation you’ve gone through that, looking back, helped your faith grow? When life gets difficult, are you more likely to “fight,” “flee,” or “trust”? Why? How could we remind each other, during tough times, that God is using this to grow us rather than crush us?

#### **3. Worthy of the Kingdom — By Birth, Not by Performance**

We heard that being “counted worthy of the kingdom of God” isn’t about earning heaven, but being born again as God’s child. What’s the difference between trying to be “good enough for God” and trusting that we are His children by grace? Do you ever feel like you have to “earn” God’s love? Where do you think that feeling comes from? How would our attitudes change this week if we really believed we are already loved, forgiven, and accepted in Christ?

#### **4. Living Out Love in the Middle of Pressure**

The Thessalonians showed their growing faith by abounding in love for each other, even while facing persecution. When we’re stressed or under pressure, how do we usually treat each other as a family? What would it look like for our love to “abound toward each other” during a busy or stressful week? Is there someone (inside or outside our family) we can intentionally love better, especially if life is hard for them right now?

#### **5. Focusing on God’s Story, Not Just Our Comfort**

The sermon contrasted living for our own comfort and success with living for Christ and His kingdom. Where do you see the “rocky road” of life pulling people away from God in our world today? Are there any areas where we might be chasing comfort,

success, or approval more than we're seeking to please God? As a family, what is one practical way we can shift our focus from "my story" to "God's story" this week?

# Family Conversation Guide for Children & Early Teens

## 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

### The 'Y' in The Rocky Road of Life

#### AGES 5-7: SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Jesus Helps Me When Kids Are Mean**: When other kids say hurtful things or leave us out, we don't have to be mean back. Jesus can help us respond with kindness and remember that He loves us.

#### Discussion Questions:

- (a) If a friend says, "You can't play with us," how do you feel?
  - (b) What is one kind thing you could say or do instead of being mean back?
  - (c) Can we practice a short prayer you could say in your heart when you feel sad or left out?
2. **Choosing Jesus Over Fitting In**: Sometimes friends want us to do something we know is wrong (like lying, teasing, or not listening to a teacher). Even if everyone else is doing it, we can choose to please Jesus first.

#### Discussion Questions:

- (a) Has anyone ever asked you to do something you knew wasn't right? What happened?
  - (b) What could you say if a friend wants you to do something that doesn't make Jesus happy?
  - (c) Who can you ask for help (teacher, parent, Jesus) when you feel pressured?
3. **Growing a "Big" Faith in Little Moments**: "Exceedingly growing" faith for young kids looks like small, everyday choices—praying, saying sorry, sharing toys, obeying quickly.

#### Discussion Questions:

- (a) What is one small way you can show Jesus you love Him this week (at home or school)?
- (b) When is it hardest for you to obey or share?
- (c) How do you think Jesus feels when you choose to do the right thing, even when it's hard?

#### AGES 8-12: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Standing for What's Right When Friends Don't**: Like the Thessalonians, kids can show their faith by how they act when others pressure them—at school, in group chats (if they have them), or on games.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) Have you ever seen friends doing something online or at school that you knew wasn't right? What did you do?
- (b) What makes it scary or hard to stand up for what's right?
- (c) What are some words or phrases you can use to refuse ("I'm not okay with that," "Let's not talk about that")?

2. **Turning Hard Things into Growth, Not Grumbling:** Trials at this age can be bullying, school pressure, or feeling "left out" socially. Romans 5 and James 1 say God can use these to grow perseverance, character, and hope.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) Think of something hard you're going through now (or recently). How does it make you feel?
- (b) How might God use this to grow your faith, your character, or your courage?
- (c) What's one way you can respond differently next time—less complaining, more trusting, more praying?

3. **Remembering "I'm God's Child" in Digital Spaces:** "Being "counted worthy" because we belong to God helps kids not base their worth on likes, comments, streaks, or followers (if they're beginning to use digital platforms).

Discussion Questions:

- (a) How do you feel when you see other kids with more likes, followers, or cooler things?
- (b) What's the difference between "I'm valuable because people like me" and "I'm valuable because I'm God's child"?
- (c) Next time you feel left out or "less than," what could you remind yourself about who you are in Christ?

**AGES 11-15: DEEPENING THE CONNECTION APPLICATION POINTS**

1. **Living for Christ, Not for Approval (Online and Offline):** Teens are often pulled to find identity in appearance, performance, or popularity. This sermon reminds us that our worth and "worthiness" come from being born again, not from social status.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) Where do you feel the most pressure to "perform" or be perfect (social media, sports, grades, looks)?
- (b) How might your choices online change if you believed deeply, "I'm already accepted in Christ"?
- (c) Are there any posts, follows, or accounts that push you to seek approval more than honor God?

2. **Responding to Social “Persecution” with Patience and Faith:** For teens, “persecution” may look like mocking for faith, exclusion because of beliefs, or being labeled as “weird” or “too Christian.” The Thessalonians had “patience and faith” under pressure; teens can too.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) Have you ever felt left out or judged because of your faith or your choices to follow Jesus? What happened?
- (b) When you’re hurt socially, do you usually fight back, shut down, or try to ignore it?
- (c) What could “patient endurance” look like in those situations—not pretending it doesn’t hurt, but staying faithful to Christ anyway?

3. **Filling Your Mind with Truth, Not Just Noise:** Exceedingly growing faith comes from hearing, receiving, and obeying God’s Word (Romans 10:17; James 1). In a constant stream of digital noise, teens need to choose what shapes their thinking.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) What digital content do you consume most in an average day (be honest)? How do you think it shapes your thoughts and feelings?
- (b) How much time do you spend hearing God’s Word (Bible, sermons, podcasts, worship) compared to everything else?
- (c) What is one practical change you could make this week (screen limit, “Scripture before screen,” unfollowing certain accounts) to help your faith grow instead of shrink?

Tips for Parents

- Be patient and listen: Give your child time to think and respond.
- Relate to everyday life: Use real-life examples and stories familiar to your child to make abstract concepts more tangible.
- Encourage questions: Let your son or daughter know it’s okay to ask questions, even if things don’t make sense right away.
- Share personal insights: Tell a personal story about a time you experienced these themes, adapting as needed for age appropriateness.

# Family Conversation Guide for Gen Z

## 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

### The ‘Y’ in The Rocky Road of Life

#### 1. Faith That Grows “Exceedingly” in a Scroll Culture

*Bible Reference:* 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Romans 10:17; John 15:5

*Application:* Let your faith grow exceedingly by what you choose to consume and create online. Don’t just scroll; stay rooted in Christ and feed on His Word so your faith grows deeper, not thinner.

*Scenario:* You spend a lot of time on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, or Discord. Most of what you see is trends, jokes, drama, and random content. You notice your Bible sits closed while your screen time keeps rising, and your faith feels shallow or distant.

*Discussion:* If someone only saw your screen time and online habits, would they see a faith that’s “growing exceedingly” or slowly shrinking—and what one habit could you change this week to help your faith actually grow?

#### 2. Standing Firm Under Peer Pressure

*Bible Reference:* 2 Thessalonians 1:4–5; Romans 5:3–4; James 1:2–4

*Application:* When you’re pressured to compromise your beliefs, see it as a chance to grow perseverance and character. Don’t just survive the pressure—let it shape you into someone stronger in Christ.

*Scenario:* Friends in a group chat are sharing explicit memes, planning to sneak alcohol/vapes into a hangout, or inviting you to cheat on a test. You know it’s wrong, but you don’t want to lose your place in the group or be mocked as “too Christian.”

*Discussion:* Where do you feel the strongest pressure right now to go along with something you know God doesn’t approve of, and how could you respond in a way that shows your faith is real and growing instead of caving in?

#### 3. Worthy Because You’re God’s Child, Not Because You’re Popular

*Bible Reference:* 2 Thessalonians 1:5; John 3:3; Ephesians 1:4–6

Application: *Let your identity be rooted in being born again as God’s child—not in likes, followers, appearance, or achievements. You are “counted worthy” of God’s kingdom because of Jesus, not your online or offline performance.*

Scenario: You post something and barely get any likes. Your friends seem better-looking, funnier, more confident, and more popular. You start to feel like you’re less valuable or less important because your numbers don’t match theirs.

Discussion: How would your view of yourself, your selfies, and your posts change if you really believed that your worth was settled at the cross and not on your latest post’s engagement?

#### **4. Choosing Love Over Drama in Group Chats**

Bible Reference: 2 Thessalonians 1:3–4; John 13:34–35; Galatians 5:22–23

Application: Show that your faith is real by letting your love “abound” in group settings—especially in digital spaces—refusing to join gossip, bullying, or canceling, and choosing to defend, include, and encourage instead.

Scenario: A group text or server starts trash-talking someone who isn’t there—sharing screenshots, roasting their looks, spreading rumors. You’re not leading it, but you’re watching, reacting, and silently going along with it.

Discussion: The next time your group chat starts tearing someone down, what is one specific, loving action you could take (or one line you could send) that would show you belong to Jesus more than you belong to the drama?

**These points aim to empower Gen Z to live out their faith genuinely and courageously in various aspects of their daily lives, reflecting Biblical integrity, compassion, and steadfastness.**

Slide 1	Blank
Slide 2	2 Thessalonians 1:1-5 The 'Y' in the Rocky Road of Life
Slide 3	Blank
Slide 4	1 & 2 Thessalonians Comparative Slide
Slide 5	Blank
Slide 6	2 Thessalonians 1:1-2 The Power of a Greeting
Slide 7	Blank
Slide 8	2 Thessalonians 1:3-5 Setting Your Sights to the Proper Height
Slide 9	Blank
Slide 10	A. Pleasing God (He 11:4, 5, 6); B. Fearing God (Heb 11:7) C. Obeying God (Heb 11:8);
Slide 11	D. Enduring through trials, testings, persecution and suffering IN God's will, strength, and purposes (He 11:9-11; James 1:2-4; Ro 5:3-5; 1 Pet 1:6-7) AND having joy as we do so (James 1:2-3); E. Knowing and receiving God's promises (He 11:13) as this gives us the hope of the glory of God in our lives for we are at peace with Him (Ro 5:1-2);
Slide 12	F. Rejecting the world and not fearing man (He 11:24, 27); G. Hearing/receiving the word of God (Ro 10:17; Col 2:6-7) H. Being doers of the word (James 1:22-24, 2:26)
Slide 13	I. Prayer and dependence on God. Trusting in His strength, wisdom, and character and NOT our own. (Mk 11:24; Jude 1:20); J. Fellowship (He 10:24-25; Our passage today 2 Thes 1:3); K. The halo effect...abiding in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit (Jn 15:5; Gal 5:22-23- Eph 3:16-17)
Slide 14	L. Division, gossip, and sowing discord. (Eph 4:1-3; Pro 6:16-19; 1 Cor 1:10) M. Lack of Biblical Love ( Gal 5:22; 1 Cor 13:1-3; Jn 13:34-35) N. Hypocrisy (Acts 5:1-10; Mt 23:27-28; Jam 1:22)
Slide 15	O. Romans 5:3-5 (reference only)
Slide 16	Blank
Slide 17	My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have <i>its</i> perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. - James 1:2-4
Slide 18	Blank
Slide 19	We GROW EXCEEDINGLY through our life trials, for with Christ at the helm of our hearts we are more than conquerors!
Slide 20	Blank
Slide 21	'Y' in the Rocky Road Image
Slide 22	Blank