

Subject: A Gospel Example for the Ages – A Model of Faith

Check out the many discipleship resources for this teaching at [RESOURCES LINK]. For those wanting to view the teaching, us this [TEACHING LINK].

For those hungry and thirsty for more of Jesus,

I hope this message finds you walking closely with the Lord. As we reflect on our recent study of 1 Thessalonians 1:1-4, I wanted to recap the powerful truths we explored together about what it means to be a church that exemplifies genuine, living faith.

Summary: The sermon explored Paul's letter to the young Thessalonian church, written during a particularly discouraging season of his ministry. Despite being driven out of multiple cities and facing repeated rejection, Paul penned this encouraging letter that reminds us of essential truths about salvation, sanctification, and the transforming power of the Gospel. We examined how the Thessalonians became a model church through their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope—all done in the sight of God the Father. This passage challenges us to understand that authentic faith is not passive belief, but an active, living reality that produces visible fruit in our lives and impacts those around us.

Takeaways:

1. **Faith Produces Work, Not the Other Way Around:** Salvation comes by grace through faith alone, not by our works (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, genuine saving faith will always produce the "work of faith"—a transformed life evidenced by obedience, perseverance through trials, and character development. Dead faith produces nothing; living faith changes everything.
2. **Biblical Love Requires Sacrificial Labor:** The "labor of love" Paul commends is not sentimental affection but costly, self-giving service for the higher good of others. This Godly love is transforming rather than merely affirming, requiring us to lay down our pride and pick up our cross daily as we give our time, treasure, and talents away.
3. **Hope in Christ Sustains Us Through Persecution:** The Thessalonians' "patience of hope" enabled them to endure family division, cultural opposition, false teaching, and spiritual attacks. This living hope looks expectantly to Christ's return and gives us supernatural endurance, reminding us that while we are at peace with God, the world will war against us for His name's sake.

As we move forward this week, let us remember that we have been chosen by God—not because of our worthiness, but because of His grace. Our response to His election should be to live out our high calling with faithfulness, knowing that being the church is evidence of our genuine relationship with Christ. May we be encouraged that the same God who built His

church through Paul's three weeks in Thessalonica is the same God building His church through us today.

Grace and peace to you,

Pastor Jim

A Gospel Example for the Ages – Part 1

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1 Thessalonians 1:1-4

I. Introduction: Opportunity Often Comes With Great Risks

1. The Apostle Paul (with the assistance of Silvanus and Timothy) wrote this letter to the young church in Thessalonica around 50-51 AD. [It is likely the first of the many NT books he penned.](#)
2. The city of Thessalonica had been founded in 316 b.c. and was named for a sister of Alexander the Great. [Located along the VIA Egnatia \(that days super highway linking the whole area north of the Aegean Sea to Rome\), it was a busy and important town with a mixed population of Romans, Greeks, and Jews offering a great opportunity to spread the Gospel...but with this opportunity also came great risks as they brought truth into a pagan culture.](#)

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3. {MAP} Paul planted this church during his second missionary journey. [For those interest, read **Acts 17** for the background for both of his letters to the church in Thessalonica.](#)
4. He wrote this letter on the tail-end of tumultuous time of ministry. [First, he was driven out of Thessalonica after 3 weeks of great ministry.](#) Then, just a few weeks later, the same Thessalonica mob drove Paul out of Berea despite (or, more likely, because of) having a prosperous ministry. [Moving on to Athens, he got a poor response on moved on quickly.](#) Finally, as we read in **1 Corinthians 2:3**, a discouraged Paul came to Corinth where he wrote this letter.

A. **Teaching Point 1:** Ministry can be challenging for all of us with discouragement being all too real.

B. **Teaching Point 2:** In some great measure, because Paul's message was repeatedly rejected we have this letter. [In this, we see that our sovereign God can take what is meant for evil and turn it to good.](#)

C. **Teaching Point 3:** Paul et. al., did their Spirit-directed part in launching this church, BUT their 3-weeks of boots-on-the-ground certainly puts an exclamation point on the reality that it IS God who builds His church.

5. As we travel through this letter, we “hear” Paul’s pastoral heart of rejoicing in their being a wonderful model for other churches. **We also see him addressing (in both 1 & 2 Thessalonians) some errant doctrine regarding the theme of the 2nd coming of Christ.** Finally, he encourages and exhorts them to grow further in their relationship w/Christ no matter the adversity they faced.

A. **Teaching Point 4:** Writing this letter got Paul’s eyes off himself and back onto the things and people of God. **God used this, in turn, to draw Paul out of his discouragement.**

B. **Teaching Point 5:** The same Gospel leading the Thessalonians to salvation, brought them persecution from both Jews and Gentiles.

C. **Teaching Point 6:** There are many tertiary doctrines (meaning NOT primary doctrines) that, while not unimportant, Christians can disagree upon. **That Jesus is coming back again is an essential doctrine and if we don’t agree upon this, we are not brothers and sisters in Christ.**

6. The overarching purpose of this book is to encourage, strengthen, and reassure the Thessalonians saints toward holy living in anticipation of Christ’s 2nd coming. **One of many possible outlines¹ is:**

- 1:1-2.....Introduction
- 1:3-10.....A Saving Truth (Thanks and God’s Power)
- 2:1-20.....A Stimulating Truth (An Effective Ministry)
- 3:1-14.....A Stabilizing Truth (Praise, Love, & Holiness)
- 4:1-18.....A Strengthening Truth (Christian Maturity)
- 5:1-22.....A Sanctifying Truth (Being Ready for His Return)
- 5:23-28.....Conclusion

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¹ Modified from John Phillips, *Exploring 1 & 2 Thessalonians: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009)

Let's read our passage...V1-4.

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II. 1 Thessalonians 1:1: A Revealing Introduction

While a very Pauline introduction, there are some wonderful things for us to note in here:

1. Both of Paul's co-authors, Silvanus and Timothy, had a long and successful history with Paul. **These men had counted the cost and were "all-in" for Jesus.** What's more, we know from Scripture that both were known by the Thessalonian saints (Acts 17, 1 Thes 3:2).
2. Stop and think for a moment about Paul specifically pointing to (1) the divine origins of the alive-in-Christ Thessalonian church and (2) their personal identity with the Father and Son. **In the light of the spiritual attacks and other challenges they are facing, this encouraging reminder must have strengthened them a great deal.**
3. Finally, it is good for us to consider the grace and peace **from** Father and Son. **That the Thessalonian saints, in grace, had received salvation means they were at peace with God...**now get this, their peace with God came because He fully dealt with their sin at Calvary and this is true for every one of us having confessed Christ as LORD.

Yet, as we know from **Matthew 10:22**, that while at peace with God, followers of Christ will be hated for His name's sake and can expect the world to war against them.

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III. 1 Thessalonians 1:2: The Power of Prayer

1. Throughout Paul's letters he points to the blessing and need for prayer and the same holds true for this young church. **While there is much for Paul to be thankful for regarding the Thessalonian church, that they are being persecuted and at risk of falling prey to false teaching brings great concern.** Paul's answer is prayer. **Prayer is where the action is at.** Prayer is where the war is fought. **Prayer is**

where God's will becomes our will. Prayer is how he (Paul) and we thank God and ask for His favor.

Paul's example here is a reminder of this essential truth and our desperate need. In relationship and service, there is no more important role that we can take on for the Lords glory, the blessings of those we pray for (including those for us), and our own spiritual growth.

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IV. 1 Thessalonians 1:3-4: A Living Faith (4 Big Points)

I just love this. We are presented with the Christian character traits of faith, love, and hope being motivations leading to outward expressions of work, labor, and patience (or some translations say endurance).

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What's more, Biblical faith, love, and hope are evidence of salvation and sanctification (or becoming more Christ-like). As such, they have force and direction in our daily living...for all cause us to seek to please and honor Him by organizing and living in His will today while looking expectantly for His imminent return in the hope of eternity in His abiding presence.

Let's dig deeper:

1. Let's first consider the "work of faith". The Apostle John defines the work of faith in John 6:28-29:

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Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." - John 6:28-29

This is the work Paul is referring to here in 1 Thes...the "work" God gives us in NOT that we may earn salvation, but that, through His grace, we may, in faith, receive, His gift of salvation. As in that day, there remains a raging argument within "Christian" circles of the weight and role of a Grace based verses Works based faith.

While in no way exhausting all that can be said on this matter, let's do a brief survey of Scripture in hearing God's heart. As we do so,

remember the Thessalonians are new, on-fire, believers that are being faithful despite persecution.

- A. In **Galatians 2:11-21**, Paul presents at least two stunning truths. First, one cannot be justified (declared righteous) by the works of the law, but only by faith in Christ. Indeed, in **Romans 3:20, 23**, we read that the law's purpose is to give us knowledge of sin...that is to see ourselves as desperate sinners having fallen short of the glory of God and in need of Messiah. Back in Galatians 2, this time in verse 21, we read of the second stunning truth – if one can work themselves to salvation, why did Jesus have to become man, suffer incalculably, and die?! It's because man can never restore Himself to God...the chasm is too wide, our pride is too deep, and the evil that lurks in our hearts is all too real.
- B. Some point to James' writings on works in **James 2:20-23, 26** as a contradictory proof text in favor of salvation-by-works. James' point is that a living faith (not just a declared faith) expresses itself through works done in loving obedience and a desire to please Lord. A declared faith with no accompanying transformation [that will be readily seen in the fruit of our lives (Gal 5:22-23) found in our priorities, relationships, words, and deeds] is a dead faith.
- C. In **Romans 5:1-5**, Paul goes on to describe one's transformation as a "work" of faith. In here, he says that by one's faith through the grace of Jesus Christ, the child of God will be overcomers of the trials of this life as, in the "work of faith" in Christ, our "tribulations produce perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope...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."
- D. In **Hebrews 12:2**, we read that God is the author and finisher of our faith, with **Philippians 1:6** assuring us of His faithfulness in completing our faith.
- E. Finally, Biblical freedom comes from being in Christ and NOT in the bondage of "doing works". Paul says it this way in **Ephesians**

2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” It is at the cross of Calvary that God declared the work of salvation “finished” – it is by His will, power, wisdom, and sacrifice that we have new life and not through our feeble works.

2. Up next, their “work of faith” led to their “labor of love”...loving the Lord, loving the church, and loving the lost. The love referred to here is a Godly love...a love that is expressed through our thoughts, words, and deeds functioning for the higher good of others without regard to the cost for oneself. Because this requires we pick up our cross and lay down our pride, this is really hard work!
 - A. In the “labor of love”, we see that biblical love (while encouraging) is NOT affirming, but transforming. This kind of love is marked by giving oneself (our time, treasure, and talents) away in doing the next “right” thing. In contrast to Godly sacrificial love, man-love is self-focused, contingent upon getting something in return...it applies a cost-benefit analysis before being in play.
 - B. The hard “labor of love” is toiling under the weight of a sin-stained world and heart. The “labor of love” a choice that follows the “work of faith” for the source of Biblical love is Jesus in us. The “labor of love” comes with a great cost. The Thessalonian’s faith would have pit family members against one-another and they would have been fighting against pagan and Jewish cultural norms. God was using Paul’s letter to remind, strengthen, and encourage them to continue fighting the good fight in the patience/endurance of their hope in Christ.
3. Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ is the third of Paul’s major points regarding the Thessalonians living faith. The hope Paul has in mind here is noted in **Titus 2:13-14:**

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works. - Titus 2:13–14

- A. This hope looks expectantly to the rapture, the 2nd coming, heaven, and beyond in the clear light of the faithfulness of Jesus. This hope is a LIVING HOPE...one that is NOT static, but a hope that never ends, as it continually calls the children of God to be closer, deeper, and more complete in Christ. This is a supernatural hope that helps us endure by giving us a new heart and transformed mind.
 - B. Let's take a moment to work backwards from Paul's words of "in the sight of God and Father" at the end of v3. Their "work of faith" lead to their "labor of love" which lead to their "hope in the Lord"...all "in the sight of "or we might say for the pleasure of God and Father. They were living in God's will!
4. The fourth of Paul's major points here is "election" found in verse 4. Now for those looking at this verse as proof text that God elects, you are correct, Scripture teaches that He is sovereign, outside of time, and with foreknowledge (1 Peter 1:2) elects. That said, please do not press this truth to far in suggesting that God does not give man free-will for that is also clearly taught in Scripture.
- A. God makes choices and one of those choices is to give us free will to make our own choices consistent with His sovereign limitations. Paul is not baiting us into an unnecessary fight, but encouraging the Thessalonian saints that they are Gods. He sees them...he chose them...and because he chose/loves them first, they chose/loved/followed Him back. Their salvation was by God's grace through the faith that He gave them. Their election speaks of a high calling and a high duty to fulfill this calling – the child of God is to be who God designed us to be for His purposes, glory, and honor...for He is worthy!

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V. Closing: The Living Hope

1. Having been chosen by God, it is right for you to choose to both receive Jesus AND live a Godly life glorifying Him;

2. Being the church is evidence of our genuine relationship with Christ.
Further, it is through this relationship that God chooses to draw others to Himself; and
3. Enduring in the faith offers the security of eternal heirs of His promises on this side of heaven and the life yet to come.

[Invitation & Prayer] For God's hope to be alive in you.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-4

A Gospel Example for all the Ages – Part 1

I. Introduction: Opportunity Often Comes With Great Risks

- Six teaching points...

II. 1 Thessalonians 1:1: A Revealing Introduction

- God fully dealt with a believers sin at Calvary

Additional Scripture References: Mt 10:22

III. 1 Thessalonians 1:2: The Power of Prayer

- Prayer is where the action is at. Prayer is where the war is fought. Prayer is where god's will becomes our will. Prayer is how we thank God and for His favor.

IV. 1 Thessalonians 1:3-4: A Living Faith

- Man cannot restore himself to God...we need a Savior.
- Freedom comes from being in Christ and NOT in the bondage of "doing" works.
- The teaching for this section includes 4 big points.

Additional Scripture References: Jn 6:28-29; Gal 2:11-12; Ro 3:20, 23; Ja 2:20-23, 26; Ro 5:1-5; He 12:2; Phil 1:6; Eph2:8-9; Tit 2:13-14

V. Closing: The Living Hope

5-Day Devotional

1 Thessalonians 4:1-4

A Gospel for the Ages

Day 1: Rooted in Divine Grace

Reading: 1 Thes 1:1, Eph 2:8-9

Devotional: Paul begins by reminding the Thessalonians of their divine origins—they are a church "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This isn't merely organizational language; it's identity. Before you accomplished anything for God, He accomplished everything for you. Your salvation didn't originate in your decision but in His grace. When persecution comes, when doubt creeps in, when you feel inadequate, remember: you belong to the Father and the Son. This identity cannot be stripped away by circumstances or failures.

Today, let this truth settle deep—you are held not by your grip on God, but by His grip on you. Grace brought you in; grace will carry you through. How does knowing your identity is rooted in God's grace rather than your performance change how you face today's challenges?

Day 2: Ministry of Faithful Prayer

Reading: 1 Thes 1:2, Phil 4:6-7

Devotional: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers." Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians didn't end when he left town—it continued on his knees. Prayer isn't the preliminary work before real ministry begins; prayer IS the work. It's where battles are won, where God's will becomes our will, where thanksgiving transforms anxiety into peace. Consider Paul's circumstances—driven from city to city, discouraged, yet he prays. Not for himself primarily, but for others. Prayer lifts our eyes from our troubles to God's throne.

Who needs your faithful intercession today? Don't underestimate this sacred work. Your prayers may be the most important thing you do today. Who has God placed on your heart to pray for consistently, and what specific needs will you bring before Him today?

Day 3: Faith that Works

Reading: 1 Thes 1:3, Ja 2:14-18

Devotional: Paul commends their "work of faith"—not works FOR salvation, but works FROM salvation. This is the beautiful paradox: we're saved by faith alone, yet genuine faith is never alone. It produces fruit. The Thessalonians' faith wasn't theoretical; it was visible, active, transformative. Faith believes God's promises enough to reorganize life around them. It's the confidence that what God says is more real than what we see. This faith doesn't earn God's favor—it responds to favor already given.

Today, examine your life: does your faith have hands and feet? Are you living as though God's Word is true? The "work of faith" is simply taking God at His word and living

accordingly, trusting Him to complete what He's begun in you. What is one specific area where God is calling you to trust Him more fully and act on that trust today?

Day 4: Love That Labors

Reading: 1 Thes 1:3, 1 Cor 13:4-7

Devotional: The "labor of love" is hard work—it costs something. Biblical love isn't sentimental feelings but sacrificial action for another's highest good. The Thessalonians' love put them at odds with family, culture, and religious tradition. Yet they labored on. This love flows from Christ in us; we cannot manufacture it ourselves. It requires laying down pride, picking up our cross, and doing the next right thing regardless of personal cost. Unlike worldly love that calculates return on investment, godly love gives without keeping score. It's transforming, not merely affirming. It speaks truth even when uncomfortable.

Today, who needs you to labor in love toward them? What sacrifice is God calling you to make for another's spiritual good? Where is God asking you to love sacrificially today, even when it's costly or inconvenient?

Day 5: The Hope That Endures

Reading: 1 Thess 1:3, Tit 2:13-14, 1 Pe 1:3-9

Devotional: Their "patience of hope" anchored them through persecution. This isn't wishful thinking but confident expectation rooted in Christ's faithfulness. Biblical hope looks beyond present suffering to Christ's return, heaven's reality, and eternal promises. It's a living hope that continually calls us deeper into Christ. The Thessalonians endured because they knew this world isn't all there is.

Hope transforms how we suffer—not removing pain, but giving it meaning and a time limit. When you're weary, hope whispers, "He's coming back. This isn't forever." When you're persecuted, hope declares, "Your reward is secure." Let this hope fuel your endurance today. Live in light of eternity. Your present labor is not in vain. How does the certainty of Christ's return and eternal promises change your perspective on your current struggles?

Small Group Study Guide

1 Thessalonians 4:1-4

A Gospel Example for the Ages – Part 1

Opening Prayer: Begin by asking someone to open in prayer, asking God to guide your discussion and apply His Word to your hearts.

Opening Question: Share a time when you felt discouraged in your faith or ministry. What helped you persevere?

Sermon Recap:

Key points to recap from our study through Revelation 21:1-8:

- Paul wrote this letter during a season of discouragement after being driven out of multiple cities
- God used rejection and hardship to produce Scripture that has blessed millions
- It is God who builds His church, not our efforts alone
- The Thessalonian church was rooted "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"
- We have peace WITH God because of what Christ accomplished at Calvary
- Though at peace with God, we should expect the world to oppose us

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

1. Read Acts 17:1-9. Paul was only in Thessalonica for about three weeks. What does this tell us about the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit's work in establishing a church?
2. How does knowing Paul wrote this letter while discouraged in Corinth change the way you read his words of thanksgiving and encouragement?
3. The sermon mentions that Paul got "his eyes off himself and back onto the things and people of God." How does focusing on others help us overcome our own discouragement?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2. Paul says he prays for them constantly. The sermon states: "Prayer is where the action is at. Prayer is where the war is fought. Do you truly believe this? Why or why not? What would change in your life if you lived like this was true?"
5. Who in your life needs you to be their prayer warrior right now? How can this group hold you accountable to pray for them?

6. Read John 6:28-29, Ephesians 2:8-9 - How would you explain to someone the difference between salvation by grace through faith versus salvation by works? Why is this important?
7. The sermon defines biblical love as "expressed through our thoughts, words, and deeds functioning for the higher good of others without regard to the cost for oneself." How is this different from the world's definition of love? Share an example of someone who has shown you this kind of sacrificial love.
8. Read Titus 2:13-14 - How does hoping for Christ's return affect the way you live today? What practical difference should this "living hope" make in how you face trials?
9. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4 and 1 Peter 1:2. The sermon addresses the tension between God's election and human free will. How does knowing you are "chosen by God" encourage you in difficult times? How should being "elect" or "chosen" affect our sense of purpose and calling?

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

1. Ministry & Discouragement

Are you currently discouraged in any area of ministry or life?

What would it look like to shift your focus from your circumstances to God and His purposes?

Action Step: Write down three things you're thankful for about God's work in your life or church.

2. Prayer Life

Honestly assess: Is prayer central to your life or an afterthought?

Action Step: Commit to praying for one person daily this week. Set a phone reminder if needed.

3. Living Faith

Which is weakest in your life right now: work of faith, labor of love, or patience of hope?

Action Step: Identify one specific way you can strengthen this area this week.

4. Sacrificial Love

Who in your life needs you to "labor in love" toward them, even when it's costly?

Action Step: Do one sacrificial act of service this week for someone who cannot repay you.

5. Living Hope

Do you live with the expectation of Christ's return?

Action Step: Each day this week, ask yourself: "If Jesus returned today, would I be pleased with how I spent my time?"

Closing Prayer Points: Take time together to pray over these points as a group.

- For perseverance in trials
- For authentic faith that produces love and hope
- For each person's specific action steps
- For your group to be a "gospel example" like the Thessalonians

Discussion Questions
1 Thessalonians 4:1-4
A Gospel Example for the Ages – Part 1

1. Paul wrote this letter during a time of personal discouragement after being driven out of multiple cities. How can we use our own seasons of disappointment or rejection to minister to others and glorify God?
2. The Thessalonian church was established in just three weeks, yet became a model for other churches. What does this reveal about who truly builds the church, and how should this shape our expectations for ministry outcomes?
3. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their identity in Christ and their divine origins during a time of persecution. How does remembering our identity as children of God help us endure spiritual attacks and cultural opposition today?
4. The sermon emphasizes that prayer is where the action is and where the war is fought. In what ways have you experienced prayer as a battlefield, and how might you need to adjust your prayer life to reflect this reality?
5. Paul describes the Christian character traits of faith, love, and hope as motivations leading to work, labor, and endurance. Which of these three outward expressions is most challenging for you, and why?
6. The distinction between a declared faith and a living faith is crucial in James 2. What specific fruit in your life demonstrates that your faith is alive and not merely intellectual assent?
7. The labor of love described in this passage is sacrificial and costly, often pitting family members against one another and cultural norms. What specific costs have you experienced or avoided in your own labor of love for Christ?
8. Paul teaches that hope in Christ is not static but continually calls us to be closer, deeper, and more complete in Him. How does viewing hope as active rather than passive change the way you approach daily trials?
9. The doctrine of election is presented alongside human free will in this sermon. How do you reconcile God's sovereignty in choosing us with our responsibility to choose Him, and how does this tension impact your understanding of evangelism?
10. The Thessalonians were called to endure in faith while living in a pagan culture hostile to the Gospel. In what specific ways is contemporary culture hostile to biblical truth, and how can the church respond with both grace and conviction?

Dinner Conversation Starters

1 Thessalonians 4:1-4

A Gospel Example for the Ages – Part 1

1. Turning Discouragement Into Prayer

Paul wrote this letter while discouraged and under pressure, yet his focus is on thanking God for the Thessalonians. When we're discouraged, what usually fills our thoughts and words? How might choosing to pray for and encourage others change our attitude in hard seasons?

2. A Work of Faith and a Labor of Love at Home

The Thessalonians showed a “work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope.” What's one way you've seen faith, love, or hope change how someone actually lives? What might a “work of faith” or “labor of love” look like in our family this week?

3. Godly Love Vs. Self-Focused Love

The sermon contrasted “Godly love” (sacrificial and transforming) with “man-love” (self-focused and conditional). Where do we see each kind of love in our culture, at school, at work, or online? How could we move one step closer to Godly, sacrificial love in how we treat each other at home?

4. Standing Firm When Faith is Costly

The Thessalonian believers faced persecution and opposition because of the Gospel. What kinds of “pushback” or pressure do Christians face today—not just in other countries, but in our everyday lives? How can hope in Christ's return help us endure when following Jesus is costly?

5. Chosen by God, Living on Purpose

The sermon talked about God choosing (electing) us, and yet also calling us to respond and live for Him. How does it make you feel to think that God “sees” you and has a purpose for your life? If you really believed God has chosen you for His purposes, what is one practical thing you might do differently this week?

Family Conversation Guide for Children & Early Teens

1 Thessalonians 4:1-4

A Gospel Example for the Ages – Part 1

AGES 5-7: SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Faith at School - Trusting Jesus When You Feel Left Out**: When others don't want to play with you, you can still trust that Jesus loves you and talk to Him about it.

Discussion Questions:

How do you feel when someone says you can't play with them?

What could you say to Jesus (in prayer) when that happens?

What is one kind thing you could still do for those kids, even if they weren't kind to you?

2. **A Labor of Love - Helping Do Chores At Home**: Love means helping and sharing even when it's hard or you don't feel like it.

Discussion Questions:

What do you usually *want* to do when you are asked to help but you do not feel like it—help, or keep playing?

How can helping be a “labor of love” that makes God smile?

Can you think of a time someone helped you when it was hard for them? How did that feel?

3. **Being Kind Online or on Screens**: When you're watching shows, playing games, or seeing messages on a tablet or TV, you can choose words and actions that show Jesus' love.

Discussion Questions:

What do you sometimes feel like saying when you get upset playing a game?

What would loving Jesus and others look like in that moment?

Is there a word or phrase we could use as a family to “pause” and remember to be loving (like “time-out for my heart”)?

AGES 8-12: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Work of Faith- Standing for Jesus Around Friends:** Faith shows up in what you do when friends want you to join in something wrong (teasing, cheating, lying).

Discussion Questions:

What pressures do you feel in a moment of peer pressure—to join in, to stay quiet, or to walk away?

What would a “work of faith” look like in that situation?

If you chose to stand up for the person or not join in, how might God use that?

2. **Labor of Love- Walking in Love with Friends and Siblings:** Love means choosing to do what is best for others, not just what feels good for you—especially with siblings and close friends.

Discussion Questions:

When someone hurts you, what’s your first reaction—fight back, ignore them, or try to make peace?

How is “labor of love” different from just being “nice” to get what you want?

What’s one loving response you could choose next time—words you can say, or something you can do?

3. **Hope in Christ When Feeling Left Out:** When you’re not invited to a group, game, or online chat, your hope is not in popularity but in Jesus, who sees and chooses you.

Discussion Questions:

You discover your friends are in a group chat or playing online together and didn’t invite you.

How does that make you feel about yourself?

The sermon talked about God “choosing” us—how might remembering that help you when you feel left out?

If your hope is in Christ and not in being included every time, how might that change what you do next?

AGES 11-15: DEEPENING THE CONNECTION APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Posting and Liking Online to Reflect Your Faith**: Work of faith” means your beliefs shape what you watch, post, share, or “like” on social media, group chats, or gaming platforms.

Discussion Questions:

A funny meme or video is shared that’s cruel, sexual, or mocking someone’s faith. Everyone is reacting with likes and comments.

What temptations do you feel in that moment—join in, ignore it, call it out, or leave the chat?

How could your response show that your faith in Christ is real, not just words?

What kind of content do you think honors God in your digital life, and what doesn’t?

2. **A Labor of Love Even When it Costs Your Socially**: Sometimes loving like Jesus (standing up for someone, refusing gossip, including the outsider) will cost you social points.

Discussion Questions:

Your friend group regularly talks badly about someone who isn’t there. You know it’s wrong, but if you don’t join in, you might become the target.

What feels like the biggest risk if you don’t go along with the group?

The sermon said love is not just affirming but transforming—how might loving like Jesus actually change a friend group over time?

What is one “labor of love” you could choose in your friend group this week, even if it makes things awkward?

3. **Hope and Identity In Jesus**: Like the Thessalonians, you may face ridicule or rejection because of your beliefs. Your hope is in Christ’s return and in being chosen by Him, not in everyone’s approval.

Discussion Questions:

How do you usually respond inside when people attack your faith—anger, shame, fear, silence?

How can remembering that God “elected” or chose you, and that Jesus is coming again, give you courage and patience?

What would it look like to respond both truthfully *and* lovingly in that moment (in person or online)?

4. **Discouragement and Prayer:** Like Paul, when you’re discouraged, one way out is to pray for and encourage others instead of only focusing on yourself.

Discussion Questions:

When you’re discouraged, what do you typically turn to first: more screen time, venting, shutting down, or prayer?

How might praying for others (friends, family, people who hurt you) help change your perspective?

What is one specific person you could start praying for this week when you feel low, and one way you could encourage them (text, call, face-to-face)?

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

1 Thessalonians 4:1-4

A Gospel Example for the Ages – Part 1

1. Work of Faith- Letting Your Faith Shape Your Choices

Biblical Application: Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17)
“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31) Before you post/like/share, ask: “Does this glorify God or normalize sin?” Decide in advance: “I will not like or share content that tears people down, sexualizes others, or mocks God.” When needed, quietly remove yourself from toxic group chats instead of staying just to “keep up.”

Scenario: Imagine your group chat, or Discord is sharing “edgy” content—sexual jokes, mocking someone’s looks, or making fun of Christians. You feel the pull to like, share, or at least not say anything to avoid looking “extra” or “judgy.”

Discussion Question: How can you engage with your friends in a way that stands on your faith and encourages them to share more uplifting content rather than harmful content? The wisest choice may be to leave the group chat and allow that to show your friends you want no part in that kind of talk.

2. Choosing A Labor of Love

Biblical Application: “...labor of love...” (1 Thessalonians 1:3).
Biblical love is costly—it means doing what is truly best for others, not just what feels good or keeps the peace. “Love is patient and kind... it does not insist on its own way.” (1 Corinthians 13:4–5) “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

Scenario: A close friend betrays your trust—shares a secret, twists your words, or posts something that embarrasses you. Your other friends tell you to “cut them off” and “get revenge.” You feel hurt and angry, and ghosting them would be easy.

Discussion Question: What does “human-love” (self-focused love) say you should do in this situation? What does Christlike love say?

3. Patience of Hope

Biblical Application: “...patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Because Jesus is coming again and you belong to Him, you can endure being misunderstood, mocked, or excluded without giving up or compromising. “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Timothy 3:12) “Blessed are you when others revile you... on my account.” (Matthew 5:11–12)

Scenario: You respectfully share a biblical conviction (about truth, sex, identity, forgiveness, or Jesus being the only way) and are labeled hateful, ignorant, or judgmental. You’re tempted to never speak up again, or to water down what you believe so people won’t be upset.

Discussion Question: How does social pressure—comments, DMs, classmates—tempt you to mute or edit your faith?

These points aim to encourage Gen Z teens and young adults to stand for Christ in all areas of their lives with Biblical principles applied to their everyday life.