

How to Use Sermon Resources

- **READ AHEAD TOGETHER** - MCG's should use the Devotional at the end of this resource as a reading plan for the week leading up to your meeting.
- **SIT UNDER THE WORD** - This resource is filled with scripture references. Read them aloud, together before you answer any questions.
- **APPLY TRUTH** - The goal is deep discussion and application, not necessarily to complete this resource. Don't squash a good discussion. If you get into something important along the way that's fine.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer [2 mins]

Use the Overview [5 mins]

- Cover any key points for people who missed parts or all of the sermon

Scripture Deep Dive [30-40 mins]

- Opening Question
- Read the scripture for each question then ask the question. Some have multiple scriptures.

Close in Prayer

- In this extended prayer time, ask others to pray as they feel led, pray in a circle, pray over one another, pray to your left, or pray for someone specific. Whatever seems best.

Split Time (if applicable)

- Men with men, women with women
- Share in a circle. "What's one thing you want to celebrate? What do you need prayer and accountability for?"
- After everyone shares, pray in a circle for the person to your left/right.

SERMON OVERVIEW

Return: Haggai

Sermon Summary:

Drawing from 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5 and Acts 17, this sermon examines the founding of the Thessalonian church as a model for what genuine Christian faith looks like in practice. Preached on the 17th anniversary of Passage Church, the message challenges believers to evaluate whether their professed faith is producing visible fruit in their lives. Paul's thanksgiving for the Thessalonians centers on three defining gospel behaviors: work produced by faith, labor motivated by love, and endurance inspired by hope.

Key Points:

- The church at Thessalonica had a gospel beginning, born through Paul's reasoned preaching of Christ in the synagogue, where he explained the necessity of the Messiah's suffering, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins
- Genuine faith produces visible fruit over time, and the legitimacy of a person's profession of faith is ultimately demonstrated by the life they live afterward
- Work produced by faith is the first gospel behavior Paul identifies; faith is meant to function and produce action, not merely serve as decoration
- Labor motivated by love is the second gospel behavior; the word Paul uses communicates strenuous, costly toil, not casual effort, and it is driven by a deep love for people and a desire for them to know Christ
- Endurance inspired by hope is the third gospel behavior; biblical hope is not wishful thinking but a certain, secured future made possible by the finished work of Christ on the cross, and that certainty gives believers the strength to persevere under pressure
- The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint, and believers are called to keep moving forward through difficulty because of the confident hope they have in Christ

Scripture Reference:

- 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Stories:

- W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Dallas, was asked how he could know whether the many people baptized on a given day were genuinely saved; he replied that one should ask him again in 50 years, pointing to the fruit of a person's life as the true evidence of salvation
- Jonathan Edwards, when asked how to discern whether a revival was genuine, argued that a person is known not by their talk or emotional displays but by the fruit their life produces, citing Christ's own teaching on knowing a tree by its fruit
- A missionary to India was rejected by a village when he attempted to share the gospel; he rested under a tree at the edge of town, and when villagers noticed his feet were blistered and bleeding from his long journey, they gathered around him and asked to hear his message, ultimately coming to faith because his sacrifice demonstrated the depth of his love for them
- Pastor Matt shared the story of Passage Church's founding on September 13, 2009, tracing its journey from East Wake High School to a community center to its current building, as a personal illustration of God's faithfulness over 17 years of gospel ministry

Scripture Deep Dive

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

Paul says he regularly thanked God for the Thessalonian believers because of their faith, love, and hope. Which of those three—faith, love, or hope—do you most clearly see God growing in your life right now?

The Church Had a Gospel Beginning

2. Read Acts 17:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; Romans 10:14-17

In Acts 17, Paul “reasoned,” “explained,” and “proved” from the Scriptures that Jesus had to suffer and rise again. According to these passages, why is the preaching and explaining of the gospel necessary for people to come to saving faith?

3. Read Acts 17:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Paul’s message came “not in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance.” What is the difference between merely hearing religious words and receiving the gospel with Holy Spirit-produced conviction?

Gospel Faith Produces Gospel Work

4. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-18

Paul praises their “work produced by faith,” while Ephesians says salvation is not from works but that believers are created for good works. How do these passages together help us avoid both legalism—trying to earn salvation—and empty profession—claiming faith without fruit?

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Galatians 5:6, 13-14; 1 John 3:16-18

Paul says their labor was “motivated by love.” Based on these passages, what kind of costly actions should Christian love produce, and how can a group tell the difference between serving from love and serving merely from obligation?

Gospel Hope Produces Endurance

6. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Romans 5:1-5; Hebrews 12:1-3; 1 Peter 1:3-9

Paul says their endurance was “inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” According to these passages, why does Christian hope enable believers to keep going under pressure rather than quit when life becomes difficult?