

# The Encouraging Church

## (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10)

Well tonight we begin a new book study.  
(A book I've never preached through before,  
But one I have thoroughly enjoyed studying thus far in preparation)

So let us begin by taking a COMPREHENSIVE VIEW

If I were to give you an overall theme of the book, it would be:  
Being an Encouraging Christian

And while that is not necessarily a complex concept,  
I do think we all have things to learn  
About being more encouraging in our Christian Walk.

It is true that there are many ways to encourage  
(Many of which we will see manifested throughout our study)

- **Whether it is a word of comfort**
- **Whether it is a word of exhortation**
- **Whether it is a word of recognition**
- **Whether it is not even a word at all**

We understand that encouragement comes in many forms.

But one thing as Christians that we must remember is that Christian encouragement always comes with a goal in mind.

There is a definite aim to our encouragement.  
We are not simply patting people on the back  
To make them feel better about themselves,  
We are pushing people towards a definite end.

WHAT IS THAT END?

To be like Christ.

To be Sanctified

To be Holy

True biblical encouragement affirms people on the right path and pushes

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them to be more like Christ daily. Another term for encouragement is "exhort," which means to strongly encourage someone to move in a certain direction. This is central to the Christian life. (2 Timothy 4:2) (Hebrews 10:24)

And so we know that encouragement is far more than just an emotional pick-me-up, or even a pat on the back of approval.

Encouragement is an essential tool that one believer uses  
To push another believer towards the goal of Christlikeness.

And so we are aware that encouragement is important.

SO, HOW DO I BECOME AN ENCOURAGING CHRISTIAN?

How do I better exhort others?

How do I better stimulate others to love and good deeds?

How do I better encourage others to be obedient?

That is precisely what we will learn as we study this book of 1 Thessalonians.  
This book is all about encouragement. Let me give you the background.

TURN TO: ACTS 17:1-15

We learn a little about the town of Thessalonica.  
They were not very “noble minded”  
They were hot-headed, they were irrational, they were mob-like.

And because of that it was hard to become a Christian in Thessalonica  
And it was hard to live as a Christian in Thessalonica.

- And when Paul went there to minister he did so under difficult circumstances. (1 Thessalonians 2:2)
- And not only did they minister amid opposition, but those who believed the message did so under opposition. (1 Thessalonians 1:6)

And so this was a rough place to minister and a rough place to live.  
It even caused Paul and his companions to abruptly leave  
This new church of persecuted believers. And as Paul moved on and  
continued to suffer persecution, he knew that the same must be occurring  
for this new church he had left behind.

- This fact caused Paul to try and return to Thessalonica several times to no avail.

1 Thessalonians 2:18 “For we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, more than once — and yet Satan hindered us.”

- And this fact may have only served to heighten Paul’s concern even more.

You can imagine what Paul must have been thinking.  
Did they still stand strong?  
Had their faith overcome?  
Was Satan able to devour them?

- And these types of questions obviously led Paul to a decision.  
(1 Thessalonians 3:1-5) “Paul was afraid of what might have happened to this young church and so he sent Timothy to find out.

- But when Timothy returned to Paul, it was evident that Timothy had not encouraged the Thessalonians, they had encouraged Timothy.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-8 "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord."

It wasn't what they said, it was how they lived.  
When Paul received word that the Thessalonian church stood strong  
He was encouraged.

It sort of reminds of what John the apostle said:  
3 John 4 "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."

This was Paul's joy.

The Thessalonians had encouraged him.  
And now, he writes this letter to return the favor.

He writes to encourage those who encouraged him.

And his encouragement is easy to spot.

Paul spends some time in review in this letter.  
That is especially evident in chapter 2.

(7 times he makes reference to things they already know)  
(2:1) "you yourselves know"  
(2:2) "as you know"  
(2:5) "as you know"  
(2:9) "for you recall"  
(2:10) "You are witnesses"  
(2:11) "just as you know"  
(3:3) "you yourselves know"

Paul spends a great deal of time reminding them  
Of the things he taught them when he was there.  
And not only what he taught, but how he lived among them.

And the concept is to remind them to imitate him as he imitates Christ.  
It is a soft encouragement  
To remember how to walk and to continue to do it.

And then he takes that encouragement even to a higher level  
As we see at the end of chapter 3 and in chapter 4.

(1 Thessalonians 3:11-12 1 Thessalonians 4:1 "1 Thessalonians 4:9-10)  
Paul's encouragement is far more than "You are doing great!"  
Paul's encouragement is "You are doing great, now do even better!"

He wants them to go all the way to be like Christ.

But even then his encouragement is not finished.  
We also see that "Consolation" type of encouragement.

As I said the Thessalonians were persecuted,  
And so it is possible that even some were martyred,  
And if not they certainly faced the threat of martyrdom.

And this concern would weigh heavy on their minds  
So Paul sought to defuse that fear  
By giving the truth about those who are dead in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren,  
about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who  
have no hope."

And Paul then closes the letter  
By encouraging them to continue encouraging each other.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

And so it is obvious that throughout this study  
We will learn how to be an encouraging Christian.

And tonight we begin our study with the first chapter of this great letter.

(1:1) "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace."

At one point in Paul's life it is clear that he was concerned  
Whether or not there was even a church left to write a letter to,  
But they had endured and now Paul writes to encourage them.

As we study this first chapter it opens in a VERY OPTIMISTIC way.

(2) "We give thanks to God always for all of you"

And there we understand that when a church begins  
And when a church remains, all credit and thanksgivings go to God.

God is the author of salvation, God is the sustainer of our faith,  
So while Paul is encouraged by the Thessalonians, he is grateful to God.

And in this first chapter we see two main reasons why Paul is grateful to God.

## **1. GOD CHOSE YOU**

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

When you read those first 5 verses we see that  
There are actually numerous reasons why Paul is thankful.

As he looks at the faith or the love or the hope of the Thessalonians  
All of these are reasons why Paul is grateful.

But in reality all of those are a byproduct of something else.  
Those things exist because God chose them,  
And that is the point Paul makes in verse 4.

**(4) “knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;”** And once again we cannot escape the absolute sovereignty that surrounds salvation.

If we had time we could again go in and through the doctrines of grace  
And the sovereignty of God.

And regardless of what you believe about those doctrines,  
There is no denying it here.

It was not the Thessalonians who chose God,  
It was God who chose the Thessalonians.

It was God who sent Paul.  
It was God who opened their heart to believe.  
It was God who opened their eyes to see.  
It was God who gave enough life for them to respond.

If God hadn't chosen them, they would not be saved.

John 6:44 “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

And we are again reminded of that powerful chapter in Ephesians 2  
In which we were dead in our transgressions and sins.

“But God, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead, raised us up”

Men can't come to God apart from God's choosing.  
And so Paul is right to give the credit for the Thessalonian church  
To God and God alone.

He chose them for salvation.

And it is because of God's choosing that they live the way they live.

In fact Paul gives three ways that he knows that God chose them.

### **1) Evident in your SERVICE (3a)**

**"constantly bearing in mind your work of faith"**

The Thessalonians were serving God.

They were consistent in Christian service and ministry.

They had not retreated from their responsibilities,

They were determining to live the Christian faith.

### **2) Evident in your SACRIFICE (3b)**

**"and labor of love"**

We know that love is a sacrifice of self for the good of another.

Not only did the Thessalonians exhibit this

By helping Paul and his friends escape the city,

But by their willingness to cover for him.

They gave of themselves for the good of others.

### **3) Evident in your STEADFASTNESS (3c)**

**"and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ"**

Simply put, they did not give up.

They did not quit just because it was difficult.

They did not stop even though there was opposition.

And even without Paul there to guide them, they had remained faithful on their own.



And so Paul says we constantly pray to God the Father,  
Thanking Him for His choosing you, and it is evident that He has chosen you  
and saved you because you have faith, hope, and love.

The presence of these three attributes in their lives help Paul to know  
That what occurred in Thessalonica was true salvation.

That is what he means in verse 5

(5) "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and  
in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men  
we proved to be among you for your sake."

And that is an interesting statement.

Paul is saying we know now that your acceptance of our gospel  
Was more than just lip service.

We know that you accepted our gospel  
Because the Holy Spirit was convicting you  
And because the power is evident in your transformed lives.

"Timothy told us about your faith, hope, and love and now we are convinced  
that you really did come to a true saving faith in Christ."

And that is a huge encouragement to Paul.

Let's look for a moment when Paul gave his list of sufferings?

Do you remember the last hardship he listed?

2 Corinthians 11:28-29 "Apart from such external things, there is the daily  
pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my  
being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"

Paul had the heart of a true minister of the gospel.

He wasn't just blowing into some city trying to get results so that he could  
go to the next city and say, "Had 1,500 conversions in Thessalonica".

Paul was concerned that every one of those conversions was real,  
And this was always his concern.  
That is why he kept writing letters and returning to visit.

In fact, it was the churches who failed to demonstrate true faith  
That grieved him the most.

We are all familiar with the concern the Corinthian church caused him  
What with all of their immorality and lack of love.

Remember the Galatians?

Galatians 1:6 Galatians 4:11 "Galatians 4:19-20 Or how about the  
Ephesians? Ephesians 4:17-24

Paul would travel and plant these churches and witness a huge response.  
But his heart never rejoiced fully at the initial response.  
Paul rejoiced years later when they were still walking in truth.

That was how Jesus responded as well; remember?

John 8:31-32 And when Paul received news that the Thessalonians stood  
strong

He was overjoyed and knew that salvation was real,  
God really had chosen the Thessalonians,  
And God really had used Paul to reach them.

**WHAT ENCOURAGEMENT!**

God had actually used him to draw out His elect,  
And it was certain as evidenced by their fruit.

3 John 4 "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in  
the truth."

**God Chose You**

**#2 GOD CHANGED YOU**

**1 Thessalonians 1:6-10**

Down in verse 9 we read that  
The Thessalonians were formerly idol worshipers.

We already know they came from a  
“hot-headed” “narrow minded” “mob-forming” town.

And apparently one which was steeped in pagan idolatry.

BUT NOT ANY MORE.  
God had changed these people.

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature;  
the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

Paul even lists 5 characteristics of the Thessalonians  
That reveal their change.

### **1) THEIR OBJECTIVE (6a)** **“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord”**

That was certainly different.  
Before they lived for themselves and worshiped idols.

Now they were actually doing everything they could to be like Jesus,  
And to follow Paul example.

This is not the passion of a lost person.

### **2) THEIR OBSTACLE (6b)** **“having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,”**

And this makes their objective even more impressive.  
They didn’t just go with the crowd or the mob in accepting Christ.

They achieved their goal by swimming upstream.

That is not the attitude of a lost man.

### **3) THEIR OBSERVERS (7-8)**

**“so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.”**

What an impressive resume.

Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to find out how they were doing,  
But Timothy didn't have to make it all the way there to learn.  
The Thessalonians faith was famous.

The Macedonians knew about it.  
Those from Achaia knew about it.  
And people in many other places knew as well.

This church had developed a reputation  
As those who obey God even during tribulation.

Wouldn't that be great?

We all know that everywhere you go, someone has heard of Spur.  
Wouldn't it be great if what they heard  
Was that the Christians there are the real deal?

What if people said, “Don't stop in Greater New Antioch unless you want a sermon”?

What if people said, “Those Greater New Christians love Jesus”?

That is what happened to the Thessalonians.  
People knew about their faith everywhere.

And Paul was encouraged at the change in their lives.

#### **4) THEIR OBSESSION (9)**

**“For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,”**

I hope you caught what Paul said there.

Paul mentioned that people who know about you share their experiences with us.

In other words, they tell us,  
“Boy you sure made a difference in that town”.

And then they go on to tell us “How you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.”

In other words, it was obvious to all that the Thessalonians  
Were far more than just marginal Christians.

Those guys were obsessed.  
They were passionate.  
And they left an impression.

And the people who hear their testimony  
Go away convinced that those guys are for real.

#### **5) THEIR OUTLOOK (10)**

**“and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”**

They also know that you are looking for the return of Christ.

When they see the suffering you endure, it is obvious that you tell them,  
“It won’t always be this way” “Soon, Jesus will return and deliver us.”

Because they are convinced that you are eagerly waiting for Jesus.

And the point being, that the Thessalonians were on fire for God  
And in love with Christ, to the point that everyone knew it.

That's quite a change over an idol worshipping, hot-headed, mob.

These guys were different.  
Not only had God chosen them, but God had changed them.

And Paul was encouraged.

Tonight, just let me challenge you to be that type of an encourager.  
Let your obedience to Christ inspire other Christians to be obedient.

One friend spoke at his Pastor's service said "I think about a lot of the  
sacrifice and the trouble that he went through; people criticizing him. He just  
really had to turn the whole situation over to the Lord. I know by watching  
his example, it grew my faith."

We aren't talking about the lost here.  
"Make them want what you have"

What we are talking about  
Is challenging and encouraging fellow believers.

You follow Christ in such a way that it encourages others to follow your lead.

That is how you encourage as a Christian.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build up one  
another, just as you also are doing."

