

4.26.20 How Do You Want to Be Remembered? 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

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First Thessalonians is about faith, love, & hope as gifts that come from God. It is God who calls us to faith, who enables human love, and who gives us hope in the Lord. 1 Thessalonians has something to say to people struggling with their **faith**, striving to **love** their family and others even when it's not easy or when having to say goodbye, and it has something to say to those whose **hope** in life or God may be wavering. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

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

2 We **always** give thanks to God for **all** of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly 3 remembering before our God and Father **your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.** 4

For we know, brothers and sisters **beloved by God, that he has chosen** you, 5 because our message of the gospel came to you **not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;**

just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. 6

And you **became imitators** of us and of the Lord,

for in spite of persecution you received **the word with joy** inspired by **the Holy Spirit,** 7 so that **you became an example** to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

8 For **the word of the Lord** has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place **your faith in God** has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. 9 For the people of those regions report about us **what kind of welcome** we had among you, and **how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,** 10 and to **wait** for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—**Jesus**, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.”

There are mental and emotional health challenges that come with living in a time of crisis. We have fewer emotional reserves when we are living in a time of stress so what can we do to re-fill those reserves and live in a way that honors God, helps others, and enables us to be resilient and hopeful.

I read an article this week that noted, *“The coronavirus pandemic is affecting nearly every country across the globe, and while it’s unknown how many will be impacted physically, practically everyone will be affected **emotionally**. There will be prolonged isolation for some, over-crowded homes for others, sustained levels of heightened stress and anxiety, as well as financial hardships, strained relationships, grief, and loss.”*¹ That reminded me of 1 Thessalonians. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy have faced opposition, persecution, and even physical harm. They are not physically present with the Thessalonians and while they are unable to be together, Paul and his ministry team are remembering with thankfulness and deep affection the Thessalonians’ faith and example. So, they do the next best thing to being there in the first century. They write a letter to express their love and appreciation. This is something we all can do, we can look back with thankfulness and write letters to express our love, appreciation, and encouragement.

Here is the key thought I want to share with you: the anxiety, loneliness, and grief that so many people are feeling and experiencing are countered by faith, love, and hope. The antidote to anxiety is faith, the antidote for loneliness is love, the antidote for grief is hope.

Let’s walk through these verses together to see what they teach us.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy – Paul is not a Lone Ranger or a soloist, he is part of a team. They’re an example of Ecclesiastes 4:12, *“And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.”* It is vitally important for us, especially if you are living alone, to make sure every day you are connecting with other people – make a commitment to make 3-5 calls a day to hear

¹ Guy Winch, Boston Globe, 4.21.20, Loneliness, anxiety, grief — dealing with the mental health impacts of the coronavirus

someone else's voice. If it's a nice day put a chair out in your front yard and sit in the sun for a few minutes and say hello to a neighbor walking by. We all need human connection. **Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy** are part of a team and that's part of what makes them strong and effective.

Grace to you and peace – not greetings – this friendship has come into being by the actions of God in Jesus Christ, the same God whose promises include grace and peace. The arrival and acceptance of the gospel by the Thessalonians is reason for thanksgiving and in verses 2-10 Paul and his team commend the church for many things. We *“always give thanks for all of you and mention in our prayers” “constantly remembering before our God and Father your...”*

1. Work of faith, or *“work that stems from faith,” “work that belongs to faith.”* – in one sense, faith is a gift from God, but we also have to work at it. In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul writes to the whole community to *“work out your (plural) salvation with fear and trembling.”* We have to work out what God has worked in us. How do we do this? Two of the main ways are through **reading God's Word and praying**. This is part of why we began providing a daily Bible reading schedule for folks to follow as well as a daily verse with a brief reflection. Reading or listening to God's Word helps us to build, strengthen, and deepen our faith. Faith, like a muscle, grows stronger as we exercise it in our daily lives. Tough times reveal if we're truly putting our faith and trust in God or not. In Mark 4:35-41, when Jesus and the disciples are in a boat and storm came up and the disciples were scared and they woke Jesus up from his nap and cried, *“Teacher don't you care that we're perishing?”* Jesus calmed the wind and waves and said to them, *“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”* Part of the work that belongs to faith is trusting God in situations that are frightening or scary. That's why **prayer is the second key to strengthening our faith**. As we learn from God's Word and seek to apply it in our daily living and as we communicate with God in prayer our fears, our hopes, our needs, our dreams, for ourselves and others – our connection with God becomes more real. Regularly worshipping God as we're doing right now is a third way we build our faith. Our work of faith may not change the outward circumstance of our lives, **but it can strengthen and equip us to face them with greater resilience and perseverance.**

2. labor of love, sometimes we call something like gardening a labor of love, or less pleurably, doing the laundry. A labor of love is something we do for pleasure or out of affection and a desire to help and serve others. We will hear about love repeatedly in 1 Thessalonians. Some of us are living in small pods of relationship with one other person, or a few. Others are home alone. For those of us living with others our “labor of love” may take the form of making meals, doing laundry, taking care of the yard or garden, walking the dog, cleaning the dishes, the list goes on and on. Just as Paul referred to the **work** of faith, he doesn’t write the “*bliss of love*” or the “*rapture of love*” he speaks of ***the labor of love***. Love, especially agape Christian love that seeks the good of others and to serve others is often not easy. It may involve sharing our resources with those who have less. Love is time consuming. It takes time to make phone calls to connect with people and see how they’re doing. It takes time to text with people, to email with people, to communicate via social media, as a song by the group Orleans says, “*love takes time, yours and mine.*” There’s no getting around that.

3. steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Richard Rohr, a spiritual writer, and Franciscan friar based in Albuquerque, New Mexico wrote this week, “*The virtue of hope, with great irony, is the fruit of a learned capacity to suffer wisely, calmly, and generously. The ego demands successes to survive; the soul needs only meaning to thrive. Somehow hope provides its own kind of meaning, in a most mysterious way.*”

A very particular hope, the hope of Jesus’ return. “Wait for his Son from heaven.”

Paul also commends the Thessalonians because:

4. They are beloved of God and chosen by God. So are we, that is a message some of us especially need to hear, remember, trust, and hold on to. You are beloved and chosen by God to be a part of God’s family.

5. The message of the gospel came not only in word, but in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction.

6. The church **became imitators of Paul and his companions, and of the Lord** – we may think of something that’s an imitation as fake, less valuable, or lacking in originality. However, in faith and personal conduct, imitating those whose lives are admirable is an

ancient practice about the shape of the Christian life. Paul is praising the Thessalonians for something they're already doing.

7. **Received and Shared the Word** - In spite of persecution, they **received the word with joy** inspired by the HS. Here as elsewhere in the NT – the Gospel brings joy. Joy is characteristic of the kingdom. **They became an example** to believers throughout the Greek mainland for how they welcomed Paul and his team and the gospel. **The evangelized become the evangelists.** One of the good things about these days is that so many of you are sharing with your family and friends links to our service or the sermon or even the brief daily Bible verse reflections. From Florida, to Texas, Colorado, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Tennessee, and many other places you all are sharing on Facebook or emailing or texting links and it is a way we all can share the Word we have received.

9. They **turned from idols, to serve a living and true God.** Speaking the language of conversion. The church was largely composed of Gentiles.

10. They're **waiting** for Jesus who rescues us from judgment. Wait for Jesus who rescues us from wrath or judgment refers to God's righteous response to persistent human disobedience. To wait is to expect, to acknowledge something is out of our hands and beyond our control, waiting for God is a primary attribute of the Christian life.

In the Christian faith the pattern of transformation is always suffering transformed, not suffering avoided, death transformed, not death avoided. That is always a disappointment to people, because we want one without the other - transformation without cost, pain, change, or surrender.

If you've never made a faith decision about putting your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, as the one you are hoping in now and always, I encourage you to invite Christ into your heart by faith, believing that he teaches the way to live in this world as daughters and sons of God, that through his death on the cross we have the forgiveness of our sins, in his resurrection we have the hope of eternal, abundant joyful life empowered by the Holy Spirit. I would love to hear from you if you've done this or what to know more about how to do that.

I also encourage you to reflect on this message and to think about at least one thing you can do to work at and strengthen and share your faith. For one person it may mean reading the Bible maybe for the first time, for another it might mean participating in our Wednesday evening prayer time, for another it might be thinking about what “labor of love” I can do to make life a little easier or less stressful for those I’m living, working, or interacting with each day. For someone else it might be a decision to share with family members or friends sermons or services or devotions that you think might be a blessing to them. Some of us may have been worshipping or serving idols and not even realized it, like a fish living in a polluted pond, doesn’t know what’s getting into it and poisoning it. We may need to reorient our life, what we read, where we’re placing our ultimate trust. Some of us may need to turn from idols to serve the living and true God.

Obviously one of the saddest aspects of living in these days of the pandemic are the deaths of so many people. The most recent Boston Sunday Globe had 16 pages of obituaries and death notices. In an obituary, families often convey some personal information that communicate key aspects of a person’s life. Often, they reflect how a person wishes to be remembered.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy remember the Thessalonian church for the wonderful example they set for believers and non-believers. It would be great for any church to be remembered in the same way including ours.

How would you like to be known? How would you like to be remembered?

How about for your work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Blessing: Teresa of Avila, Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing upset you.

Everything changes. God alone is unchanging.

With patience all things are possible.

Whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone is enough.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. What value is there in Paul working and serving as part of a team? What do you appreciate about serving, working, or collaborating with others?
2. Verse 2 states, *“We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers.”* Why is giving thanks to God for the people in our life important? Who are you especially mentioning in your prayers this week?
3. Paul’s team was *“constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Which of these comes the easiest to you – faith, love, or hope? Which do you find the most difficult? Each term is modified by a word that indicates it’s not easy – *“work, labor, steadfastness,”* what does that teach us about faith, love, and hope?
4. Make a list of all the virtues, characteristics, and behaviors of the Thessalonians that are mentioned and praised in 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10. How many of those virtues, characteristics, and behaviors do you see in your life? In the collective life of BBC? Which one would you like to grow in and practice more in the coming week?
5. Paul commends the church for becoming imitators of Silvanus, Timothy, and himself as well as the Lord. Is there someone who models the Christian life in a way you’re trying to imitate in your own life? Why is it helpful to know someone we can emulate in this way?
6. Discuss or reflect on this quote: *“In the Christian faith the pattern of transformation is always suffering transformed, not suffering avoided, death transformed, not death avoided. That is always a disappointment to people, because we want one without the other — transformation without cost, pain, change, or surrender.”*