

### 7.3.22 Four Cornerstones to Build Your Life On 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

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Have you ever seen a cornerstone? Cornerstones have been around for thousands of years. Historically, the cornerstone was the first stone set during the building process. Careful measurements were taken to ensure the cornerstone was square to ensure the proper alignment of the remainder of the building. It was critically important to get the cornerstone correct, because everything else was set in reference to it. If the cornerstone was wrong, there was no way the rest of the building could be right. Everything would be off. While in architecture, there's only one corner stone, most buildings have four corners, and having all of them solid, dependable, and trustworthy was important for several thousand years when stones were the primary material used in constructing large buildings including temples, cathedrals, and churches. It was amazing walking on the Acropolis in Athens this spring and seeing the incredible structures that have survived earthquakes and wars because they were built on such a good foundation.

We also visited the city of Thessaloniki, the second most important city in Greece and home to a million inhabitants. In the first century, Thessalonica was the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia, and it was important for its location on both sea and land routes of travel and trade. If the New Testament was arranged in the order in which the books were written, Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians would most likely be the first book in the New Testament.

In 1 Thessalonians **Paul writes about four cornerstones to build your life on as an individual and as a church. They are faith, love, hope, and the message of the gospel or the word of God. Paul says all of them are gifts that come from God.** God calls us to faith, enables human love, and gives us hope in the Lord.

1 Thessalonians has something to say to you if you're struggling with your **faith**, striving to **love** others even when it's not easy, or if your **hope** in God or life may be wavering. These three cornerstones come to us through the fourth, the word of God.

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.”

In this the earliest of his letters, Paul introduces in the first verses **three of the great cornerstones of the Christian faith to which he will return repeatedly in his letters— faith, love, and hope. If you want to build your life right, true, and well, Paul says, build on these and everything else will come out stronger**. Paul was creating engagement and connection with the church around **a clear simple set of priorities – faith, love, hope, and the message of the gospel**.

Paul is writing to a community that was threatened by social pressures and at times persecution to turn back to the life from which they'd come. In referring to, **“Your work of faith,”** Paul is saying that while faith is a gift and a result of grace –you also have to work at it. **Faith doesn't grow stronger without your active participation**. If

you want your faith to get stronger and built up you need to be “working” at it. Like a muscle, faith gets stronger by being exercised and faith often gets stronger when it’s tested and even pushed to the limits of what you think you can endure.

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 you do this? Two of the main ways are through **reading God’s Word and praying.** This is part of why we are providing a daily Bible reading schedule for folks to follow as we go through the Books of the Bible as well as a daily verse with a brief video reflection. Reading or listening to God’s Word, the fourth cornerstone, helps you build, strengthen, and deepen your faith. Tough times reveal if you’re putting your 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 crucial to strengthening your faith.** As you learn from God’s Word and seek to apply it in your daily living and as you share with God in prayer your fears, your hopes, your needs, your dreams for yourself and others – your connection with God becomes more real. Regularly worshipping God as you’re doing right now is another way you build your faith. Your work of faith may not change the outward circumstances of your life, but it can strengthen and equip you to face them with greater resilience and perseverance.

In addition to **“Your work of faith,”** Paul mentions their **“labor of love.”** The Greek implies toil, or troublesome labor, which you’re motivated by love to bear. When you hear the phrase, **“labor of love”** what comes to mind? The phrase implies that some aspects of loving other people aren’t easy and remember these words are written **to a church** and not to a couple in a romantic relationship (although there are some “labors of love” involved in those relationships too). A labor of love may be something you do from a desire to help and serve others or out of affection or because it gives you joy. Paul writes about love repeatedly in 1 Thessalonians. Some of us live with other

people, others live alone. For those of us living with other people 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 challenging. Love is time consuming. It takes time to get together with people in person and to have an in-depth conversation or go for a walk, it takes time to listen to someone, to make phone calls to connect with people and see how they’re doing. It even takes time to text, email, or connect via social media. Love takes time, yours, and mine. There’s no getting around that.

In **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**, Paul gives some examples of what a *“labor of love”* is – it’s being *patient* – when we’re tempted to lose our cool; it’s being *kind* rather than indifferent or mean; *love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* Clearly we wouldn’t need to be patient and kind and all of the rest if love weren’t sometimes a “labor.” Love is not all moonlight and roses. True love involves sacrifice, acceptance, negotiation, speaking the truth in love, confession, forgiveness, a commitment to resolve conflict peacefully, and more. All these are needed in relationships within a church as well as in our personal relationships. How are you doing when it comes to your **labor of love**?

**The final part of Paul’s prayer is thanks for the Thessalonians “steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** The opposite of “steadfast” is unsteady, wavering, unreliable, weak, or untrustworthy. Having steadfast *“hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”* makes a significant difference in our lives. Having hope that is unwavering, dependable, strong, firm, and resolute is especially important when life is difficult. We can have steadfast hope in our **Lord Jesus Christ** because Jesus is dependable, strong, and trustworthy.

Hope is intertwined with **the message of the Gospel, the fourth cornerstone**. The message is the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and faith in him changes your

life forever which gives you hope. **Lord** means Jesus is your Leader not the Roman Emperor for the Thessalonians nor any politician for you today; our first allegiance is to Christ. **Jesus** means *“he will save his people from their sins”* (see Matthew 1:21).

**Christ** means Anointed one or God’s Chosen One. Jesus is all three of those things to the Thessalonians and for us as well. Paul is writing about the very particular hope of Jesus’ return and how we conduct ourselves as we wait. While Paul felt the return of Christ was imminent, and some people feel the same way today, the most important thing you can do is to be building your life on faith, love, and hope so you’re prepared whether Christ returns tomorrow, or you go to him.

We’re living in serious times of crisis that will have a great impact on the future which is causing tremendous mental, emotional, physical, and relational stress and making it difficult to be hopeful. I was listening to a podcast this week with Carey Nieuwhof and Andy Crouch, and they were discussing the epic toll economically, educationally, and institutionally being caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, political, racial, and social division, Russia’s war against Ukraine, climate and environmental issues, and mass shootings. All of these issues are leading to epidemic levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression. As I listened, I thought, **the anxiety, loneliness, and depression that many people are feeling, and experiencing today are countered by faith, love, and hope. The antidote to anxiety is faith, the antidote for loneliness is love, the antidote for depression is hope.**

I encourage you to think about at least one thing you can do to work at, 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 morning prayer time, for another it might be thinking about what “labor of love” you can do to make life a little easier or less stressful for those you’re living, working, or interacting with each day. For someone else it might be sharing with family members or friends sermons, worship services or devotions that have touched you that you think might be a blessing to them. Some of you may be worshipping or serving idols and not realize it, like a fish living in a polluted pond, doesn’t know what’s getting into it and poisoning it. You may need to reorient your life, what you read, watch, or listen to, and where you’re

placing your ultimate trust. Some of you, like the Thessalonians, may need to turn from idols to serve the living and true God.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy are part of a team, and they don't face the challenges of their time alone. We need people in our lives and need to be there for others to be a source of support and encouragement. Paul and his team also pray faithfully for the church, and we need to pray for the church and for one another. Paul remembers the Thessalonian church for the wonderful example they set for believers and non-believers in their region. It would be great for any church to be remembered 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? Build your life on these and the message of the Gospel and your life will be built on a solid foundation.

**Prayer:** Gracious God by the power of your Spirit inspire us to diligence in our work of faith, selflessness, and humility in our labor of love, and grant us a sense of unwavering hope in our Lord Jesus Christ that sustains us in all the trials and triumphs of life. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

**Blessing:** 1 Thessalonians 3.12-13, "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

**Live by Faith, Be known for Love, Be a Voice of Hope.**

## Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Why do you think the Apostle Paul worked and served 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. What does Paul say in 1 Thessalonians about the role of the word of God or the message of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit?
6. 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?
7. 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.”*