

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

October 23, 2022



INTRODUCTION

Who is someone you thank God for? Why?

Who is someone you hope is thankful for you? Why?

What are some reasons you would like people in your life to be proud of and thankful for you?

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were thankful for the believers in Thessalonica. The gratitude they had for the people who made up this church went deeper than some of the surface level thankfulness we often feel and express today. They weren't just thankful because the Thessalonians were fun to hang out with, helped with projects, or gave them a ride. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were thankful because these believers were growing in faith and love—and that's a big deal.

DISCUSSION

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-2.

What does it mean that this church was “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”?

There are over 5,000 churches of various denominations and religions in Mississippi. How can you tell if a church is “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”? How can you tell if it isn't?

What does verse 2 tell you about these missionaries' hearts for the church at Thessalonica?

Shortly after Paul had written and sent his first letter to this group of new believers, he received a report about some issues they were having. So Paul—as was his custom—invested great care in replying with a written letter. The greeting in 2 Thessalonians is nearly identical to the greeting in 1 Thessalonians. Paul, Silas, and

Timothy identified themselves, their audience, and their hope for their audience.

🌿 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-5.

From verses 4-5, what happened since Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians? How had persecution affected this church?

Based on verses 3-4, what evidence was there of God's work in the Thessalonian believers' lives?

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that God had already worked in their lives and God continued to show Himself to them and through them. They had received grace from God and, they knew He had been more than fair with them. Their troubles didn't erase God's grace. Paul was impressed with their faith, and he noticed that their love was growing in the way they treated each other. These Christians didn't let the persecutions they faced stop them. They kept going.

Have you ever struggled to keep your faith in a time of difficulty? What (or who) helped?

Paul thanked the Lord for the Thessalonians' steadfast faith, their love for each other, and their enduring hope. Which of those three stands out as something you need to work on? Explain.

How might growing in that area help you be more thankful to God?

Why is it important to spend time reflecting on the things God has done for you and the ways He has blessed you? How might doing so help increase your faith in God? Your love for others?

If you received a message from someone who had been helpful in leading you to Christ, it might include words like those Paul used to open 2 Thessalonians. That person would be happy to tell someone else about what God had done in your life. This Christian wouldn't only think about when you were converted but also would point out what God is still doing in your life.

Understanding what God has already done in our lives helps us realize we can continue trusting Him. He has already been more than fair to us.

Isn't it enough that God knows our hearts? Or should there be evidence in our lives that we are enduring in faith and showing love to other people? Explain.

When believers endure difficulties in faith, they show clear evidence that something good is still ahead: the righteous judgment God will render to every person. We think of judgment as a negative, but judgment in this case is not condemnation—it results in an eternally positive verdict for Christians.

GOING DEEPER

 READ 1 PETER 2:12.

Why does it matter how we relate to each other in our student ministry?

Why is growing in love for the other members of Summit Students an essential aspect of evidence of Christ in you? Is growing in love for others optional? Why or why not?

APPLICATION

What clear evidence is there in your life that you are growing in faith?

What clear evidence is there in your life that you are growing in love for others?

What changes would take place in your life this week if you were to increase in faith and in love for others?

PRAYER

Thank God for the work He has done to strengthen the faith of the members of FBC Summit. Pray that He would deepen the love that the members our group have for one another. Ask Him to help our group live in such a way that we give clear evidence of Christ in us.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians:

October 30, 2022 --- 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

COMMENTARY

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

1:1-2. Within a short time of Paul's first letter, the Thessalonian Christians received yet another letter, co-authored by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Since the three missionaries were still together, most likely only a few months separated the two writings. They wrote to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a good description for any local church—grounded in a particular city or town, belonging to the community, but connected to our Lord. The church is an assembly of people, called out from the city's throng to worship Christ, then sent back into the city to proclaim and live his goodness. We are citizens of two worlds.

God is the wellspring of grace. He has a passion to give, and this extravagance issues from His love. Grace is any action or gift freely given; it cannot be earned or retained by personal effort. And when we are speaking of God's grace, it covers everything. But even though God's grace does not depend upon us, it can be hindered by us through sin, ingratitude, and refusal.

1:3. Paul's opening statement, "We ought always to thank God for you", sounds a bit like grinding duty. While obligation is felt in these words, it is not guilt-induced. Paul did, in fact, feel a duty to give thanks, but the duty was not to the Thessalonians, but to God. Paul literally had an outstanding debt before God, and it was a debt of thanks. Hearing of the spiritual life and development in the Thessalonians, he knew that God's faithfulness undergirded their progress. Consequently, an ongoing offering of thanks was due God.

The Thessalonians were the occasion of Paul's thanksgiving, but God was the source, for it was God working in partnership with them, which had caused their faith and love to increase. Faith refers to the out workings of Christian belief. It is not just doctrinal dogma, but coherence of belief and action.

1:4. This is a transition verse, combining delight with a hint of what will follow, as Paul turned his attention to the hardships these believers confronted each day. Despite some of the internal problems of the church, such as laziness and misconceptions about Christ's return, Paul recognized some sterling qualities in these believers. He encouraged them by pointing these qualities out: we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. Love (v. 3), faith, and perseverance (made possible through hope), form the eternal triad. Paul not only commended them for these qualities, he also spread the news to other churches. He was thrilled at the genuine nature of their faith.

The persecutions and trials they encountered were varied, yet unspecified. These could have been anything which resulted from faith in Christ and from seeking to live righteously in a hostile culture. Their perseverance was not a meek “I can take it” but a steadfast, heroic strength from God. Such continuance under difficulties results from an abiding trust in God’s goodness and sovereignty.

1:5. Paul declared, “All this is evidence that God’s judgment is righteous. All what? It hardly seems likely that the persecutions were evidence of God’s righteous judgment. Most likely it was the Thessalonian believers’ ability and power to persevere and stand in the midst of unjust hardship that was the evidence pointing to God’s judgment. The truth of the gospel, the transformation of their lives, and the certainty of the future justice of God were proved by their ability to withstand the various trials. In addition, their lives proved God’s indwelling power. The Thessalonians’ endurance came from something besides human capacity. By their lives they validated God’s work and strength and the transforming energy of his Spirit.

Suffering with strength not only proves the power of God; it also proves the saving faith held by these Christians: as a result, you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. They did not attain their salvation through suffering; they demonstrated it, thus establishing their worthiness to inherit the joys and benefits of God’s favor when Christ establishes His kingdom.