



## OVERFLOWING • Ministry Resulting from Life Change

### What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

#### I Thessalonians 1:1-10

##### Background on This Series

I Thessalonians seems an ideal book to study in the context of an international summer project for several reasons. Paul's visit to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9) was very brief, much like a WSN summer project. Paul had a clear call to go to Macedonia, where Thessalonica was located (Acts 16:9-10); we believe God has called students to international summer projects and has a great purpose for their time there. Paul's time in Thessalonica resulted in many new believers; we hope that WSN projects will have the same result. WSN projects typically have the benefit of a connection to an established in-country ministry, but students can still return home at the end of the summer with the sense that the new believers may flounder in their faith because of the lack of time to make a deep spiritual investment in them and ground them in the basics. I Thessalonians shows that the church in Thessalonica flourished in spite of the time constraint and the added obstacle of no mature believers guiding them. The book also contains themes of evangelism as overflow of a deep faith in Christ: healthy, exemplary community; deeply loving and sharing life with those you're ministering to; and motivation and hope to be found in Christ's second coming. Each of these connections will be explored in greater detail through the five lessons of this study series.

##### Background on I Thessalonians

In Acts 17:1-9 we find Paul and his companions in Thessalonica, where they stayed and preached the gospel for only a few weeks. This letter is written just a short time later, very likely within 1-2 years. For the purposes of understanding the book in a deeper way, it's important to read and become familiar with Acts 17:1-9.

Paul seemed to have several purposes for writing. First is to commend the Thessalonian church for their sincere faith and example to others. Second is to defend his love and ministry among them, likely in response to some questions about his love and motivation for ministering to them and possibly attempts to undermine his reputation. Third is to respond to some misconceptions and confusion about Jesus' second coming and how it affects daily life. Fourth is to spur on the church toward continued growth.

Paul starts his letter off with a glowing commendation of the Thessalonians' faith, marked by several things.

##### Faith, Hope, and Love

In verse 3 Paul remembers the Thessalonians "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." His language is intentional, as he connects unseen qualities with visible, tangible manifestations. Faith is visible in work, as sincere faith produces good works (James 2:18). This refers also to their initial conversion to Christ. In John 6:29, Jesus says, "This is the work of God, that

### What's the Big Idea?

When a person truly encounters Christ, authentic faith and life-change are produced which start a natural progression toward evangelism. Students on WSN summer projects are seeking to share their faith with a new culture; this flows from a heart authentically changed by Jesus Christ. The gospel can also ring out from that culture in increasing measure as people encounter Christ and come to faith in Him.

### What's the Problem?

The Thessalonians are commended for turning to God from idols, the visibility of their faith, the depth of their repentance and their witness and example to others. The opposites of each of these are idolatry, complacency, incomplete surrender and repentance and lack of overflow into evangelism. The former characteristics are so commendable because their opposites come more naturally to us.



you believe in him whom he has sent.” This isn’t to say that salvation is earned by works, but that the one “work” we are to do is place our faith in Christ for salvation. Jesus earned salvation for us, we step into it by faith. Love is visible in labor – when someone truly loves another, they willingly sacrifice for and serve the one they love. Hope is visible in steadfastness and perseverance – a confident expectation of Jesus’ return leads to a willingness to endure hardship and persecution.

The theme of faith, hope, and love manifested in the lives of the Thessalonians continues through the chapter. Their faith is seen in their imitation of Paul and their turning to God from idols. Their hope is seen in their joyful endurance of affliction and patient waiting upon Jesus’ second coming. Their love is seen in their proclamation of the gospel, serving God and others by telling them of Jesus and being willing to endure suffering to do it.

#### The Thessalonians Response to the gospel

Paul notes that when he preached to the Thessalonians, there was visible power and evidence of the Holy Spirit. This likely refers to, but isn’t limited to, miraculous signs and/or spiritual gifts such as tongues. The full conviction they experienced is also in view – the rapid and deep conviction of sin and depth of repentance. They encountered Christ – holy and gracious, full of grace and truth, perfect and sinless – and were gripped by their sin and need of Christ as Savior, so much so that they turned quickly to Him from their idols.

When a person truly encounters Christ, this is the appropriate response. This study encourages students to examine their own encounter with Christ and what idols they’ve not yet fully turned from. The gospel is not just for nonbelievers, the process of sanctification requires constant reminders of the gospel and the person of Jesus Christ. We need to continue to encounter Him and be sanctified.

The Thessalonians became imitators of Paul and of the Lord. Specific mention is made of enduring affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Acts 17:1-9 indicates that violent persecution occurred when Paul preached in Thessalonica, and likely continued after he left. The church endured, focusing on their spiritual reality as a child of God and heir of eternal life instead of the physical reality of affliction. Their joy was tied to their spiritual reality.

#### Example and Witness to Others

The Thessalonians’ encounter with Christ and subsequent faith naturally led to their becoming an example to other churches and a witness to the regions around them. The healthiness of their faith and community are expounded throughout the book; this is likely the example they provided to other believers. Verse 8 says that “the word of the Lord sounded forth” from them to regions close to them as well as “everywhere”, like ripples in a pond moving steadily outward after the drop of a stone in the water.

Changed lives in Christ produce evangelism. We naturally tell others about what we love, whether it be our favorite football team or TV show. Similarly, deep love for Jesus will overflow into our sharing Him with others. This study brings this concept forward and invites students to examine why evangelism sometimes does not flow naturally from them, again pointing them to deeply encounter Christ and fall more in love with Him.

The impact your team can have will run far deeper than just this summer. You can model healthy community and deep faith to the believers you spend time with, and as the non-believers you share with encounter Christ and believe in Him, they’ll begin to proclaim the gospel to others, and so on. The ripples caused by your project can truly reach the edges of the world!

## What’s Our Response?

We should examine how our hearts have changed as a result of our own encounters with Christ, and what areas of our lives we’ve not fully turned over to Him – areas where sin and idols still have a grip. We should lay these areas before Christ and invite Jesus to change those parts of our lives and continue to sanctify us.

Application can also be made in the area of evangelism. How has our faith in Christ overflowed into evangelism? What is blocking that overflow? How does our relationship with God motivate us to share our faith this summer? How can the community we have as a project team be a model to the believers and nonbelievers we’ll interact with? What are some things that can happen this summer and beyond as we share the gospel with this culture? Discuss these questions and see what specific applications come out for your team and setting.

## What Are the Questions?

### I Thessalonians 1:1-10

#### LAUNCH

You've come all this way, raised lots of support, and here you are in \_\_\_\_\_. What's been your motivation in coming on this project? What motivates you to share your faith with the students here?

#### EXPLORE

Read I Thessalonians 1:1-10.

1. What are some observations about this chapter? What themes are present? What is the main point Paul is trying to make?
2. What were some of the markers of the authenticity of the Thessalonians' faith?
3. Look at verse 3. How are faith, hope and love manifested?
4. Where do you see the qualities of faith, hope and love manifested in the Thessalonians?
5. What does it mean that the gospel came to them "not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"?
6. What might it be like to experience joy in affliction? How have you experienced this?
7. The Thessalonian church was full of believers whose lives were changed because of an authentic encounter with Christ. How did this affect their relationships with each other and with the world?
8. Why do you think evangelism is such a natural outflow of sincere faith in Christ?

#### APPLY

9. What are some ways your life has changed since you first encountered Christ? What are the visible markers of your faith?
10. The Thessalonian church is commended for their repentance in conversion and for turning to God from idols. What are some idols and sins that you have not yet fully turned from?
11. Has evangelism been a natural outpouring of your faith in Christ? Why/why not?
12. How can this team be a model and example to those we're ministering to this summer? What are some possible long-term effects of our ministry here?

## What Are the Answers?

1. Let the group share observations, encourage them to look deeply to find repeated words, themes, purpose statements, etc. Paul's point is the authenticity and depth of the Thessalonians faith, and the outflow of it into their witness.
2. Faith, hope, and love; power and signs of the Holy Spirit working when Paul preached to them; full conviction; imitation of apostles and of Jesus; perseverance; joy in spite of suffering; example and witness to others.
3. Faith: in good works and lifestyle; Love: in labor, toil; Hope: in steadfastness, perseverance.
4. Transformation of life and works produced (faith), service of God and others (love), perseverance in suffering and waiting for Jesus' return (hope).
5. External evidences like miracles and tongues are likely, full conviction indicates that the people were gripped by their sin in contrast with the holiness and grace of God – they truly encountered Christ and were changed.
6. Joy not tied to circumstances, contentment of spirit and soul because of spiritual reality rather than distress because of visible reality.
7. Evangelism was a natural outflow of their encounter with Christ and deep faith, the word of the Lord sounded forth from them like ripples in a pond (v. 8); portions of the rest of the book indicate a loving, sacrificial, healthy community (1:3, 1:6, 2:13-14, 3:6, 4:1, 4:9-10, 5:11).
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. Allow the group to discuss. Remind them of the greatness of Christ in comparison to these things. Encourage them to take them before God, repent and surrender more fully to Him.
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. Share thoughts and possibilities, dream big!
12. Desire to share what we love the most, the Holy Spirit producing a desire to follow Jesus command to take gospel to all people (Mt 28:18-20).

## Memorize

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

I Thessalonians 1:8