



# Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians

STUDY GUIDE

St John's, Southbourne

# Introduction: 1 Thessalonians

In this short series, we'll hear a lot about the gospel. Not to be confused with 'The Gospels', Paul writes on this theme to mean the whole of the good news of God's plan of salvation. This good news is like a cut diamond—it has lots of facets to it - when we believe the gospel of Jesus, it changes our lives, and our eternity.

This gospel, or 'good news', can create and strengthen faith in every situation, no matter who we are, what our history is and what is going on around us. It's a perfect encouragement to followers of Jesus. But it is also a challenge; the good news is not something to keep to ourselves. If we love Jesus and we love others, then we will want them to know him too, so that they can share in the forgiveness and new life that he alone can offer.

## Background and Context

This is one of Paul's earliest letters. He writes to a Church that he founded (Please read **Acts 17:1-8** as an introduction) from amongst the local Jewish and Gentile population. He writes to encourage them to live out their faith in a world that was often hostile to their beliefs. He focusses on the good news of their salvation in Jesus, and on his eventual return. Challenging them (and now us) to put our trust in this good news we've received, and to live it out faithfully. He often uses the word *Adelphoi* –which we would best translate as brothers and sisters—demonstrating his care for them.

## Notes on small groups

My hope for small groups is that they are a place of encouragement, challenge and fellowship on our Christian journeys. The questions offer a framework, but please feel free to explore and develop your own discussions on God's word. My suggestion is that you begin each week with time for one another before getting into the Bible - find out how people are, what God has been showing them recently, what you have found encouraging or challenging - those sorts of things. You might like to use worship music, quiet and/or begin with prayer, and please don't neglect to have fun and enjoy spending time together. Enjoy! Tom.

# Week 1 - The gospel brings joy

## Time for one another—How is everyone doing?

### Time for God's Word - 1 Thessalonians 1

Choose one verse from this passage that stands out, what is it and why?

1:2 what is Paul's overarching feeling towards them?

1:3 have you heard 'faith' 'hope' and 'love' together before?

1:4-7 How can we know when the gospel is at work?

What happens when the Holy Spirit convicts someone to believe?

1:8-9 In what ways does belief in the gospel change how we live?

1:9-10 How does their worship change in response to hearing the gospel?

### Time for today

Does the phrase 'the gospel' ever feel a bit dry and lifeless today?

Is it because we've lost sight of its power to change us?

Is there a message for us in 1:6 as we look for joy even in the midst of suffering?

How can we make our faith known without looking self-righteous?

In light of Jesus returning one day, how important is it that we share the gospel 'with words but also with power'?

### Time for prayer

## Week 2 - The gospel is love

### Time for one another—How is everyone doing?

#### Time for God's Word - 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Choose one verse from this passage that stands out, what is it and why?

2:1-4 Why is Paul keen for them to know his motives in sharing the gospel?

2:5-7 How important was this honesty in a culture that had a lot of orators?

2:8-9 What is the connection between loving people and sharing the good news?

2:10 If Paul's behaviour had been bad, how would it have affected his message?

2:11-12 Do you feel the warmth of Paul's love and concern for them?

#### Time for today

Have you experienced Christian ministry but from impure motives?

What might that look like today and how can we be alert to it?

How can we make sure that our lives are trying to please God rather than only pleasing people?

Do we really love people if we never look for opportunities to introduce them to Jesus?

Can we recognise the need to practice what we preach, without falling into moralism or guilt when we get it wrong from time to time?

#### Time for prayer

## Week 3 - The gospel is God's message to save

### Time for one another—How is everyone doing?

#### Time for God's Word - 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Choose one verse from this passage that stands out, what is it and why?

2:13 What is Paul thankful for in particular?

2:13 What does this verse tell us about the gospel and God's word?

2:14-16 How important is it to remember that Paul was a Jew when he speaks like this—and that he only refers to a specific group?

2:17-20 How would the Thessalonians have felt as they read these words of joy and glory at the end of chapter 2?

#### Time for today

How thankful are we in our prayers for people still coming to faith?

Do we recognise that suffering for our faith may well be part of God's call on our lives, and how do we prepare for it?

Have you ever felt that separation from your Church family and are there practical things we can do now and in the future to keep closely connected?

Do we see those that we encourage in faith as a hope, joy and crown?

Who could you encourage in their faith this week?

#### Time for prayer

## Week 4 - The gospel brings real life

### Time for one another—How is everyone doing?

#### Time for God's Word - 1 Thessalonians 3

Choose one verse from this passage that stands out, what is it and why?

3:1-2 How does Paul model the need to work together for the gospel?

3:3-4 Does knowing that trials will come help us be prepared?

3:5 What is Paul's biggest concern for them—suffering or losing faith?

3:6-8 Is it interesting that Paul describes encouragement through suffering as meaning he 'really lives'?

3:9-10 Where does Paul find joy, even when he can't be with them?

3:11-13 What would this prayer have meant to them as they also long to see Paul?

#### Time for today

Do you see your faith more as an individual thing or as part of something bigger?

What can we do when we're feeling 'unsettled' - do you have people you can talk to openly and honestly?

Do you have an example of how your faith was strengthened or encouraged during a difficult time?

Would you love to have a heart for prayer and people like Paul in v10?

Why not make that one of your prayers today!

#### Time for prayer

Why not use Paul's prayer of blessing in vv11-13 as the basis of your prayer for one another, our church family and the worldwide household of faith?

## Week 5 - The gospel changes hearts and lives

### Time for one another—How is everyone doing?

#### Time for God's Word - 1 Thessalonians 4

Choose one verse from this passage that stands out, what is it and why?

4:1-2 How closely does Paul connect their faith in Jesus to how they live?

4:3-8 Paul's words are clear here, that how we use the bodies God has given us matters. So, with sensitivity, we need to encourage and champion a view of sex and relationships that God has given us, as it is for our good!

4:9-12 What are the practical implications of living out the gospel that Paul encourages in these verses?

4:13-18 What is the purpose of this section, to generate debate on the end times?!! Or something else first and foremost (see verse 18!)

#### Time for today

Why does it matter to God, how we live?

How can we make sure that we don't allow our cultural bias to determine what we mean by 'immorality'?

How can we ensure we humbly recognise that we all need to trust our lives to the way Jesus has called us to live?

What might verses 9-12 mean for you in your life right now, how can you love all God's family more and more?

Do you find encouragement for yourself and others who've 'fallen asleep in Christ' in the final verses of this chapter?

#### Time for prayer

## Week 6 - The gospel creates children of light

Time for one another—How is everyone doing?

### Time for God's Word - 1 Thessalonians 5

Choose one verse from this passage that stands out, what is it and why?

5:1-3 How does Paul reiterate what Jesus had already said? (Read Mark 13:32)

5:4-8 How can they (and we) be ready for Jesus return when we won't know the timing?

5:9-11 Does Paul see the return of Jesus as something to worry about, and if not, how does the gospel help us to have faith and confidence?

5:12-28 There's a lot packed into these final verses, what stands out for you and why?

### Time for today

Looking back, do you think that Covid-19 had an impact on our culture's approach to life and death?

Is Paul asking us to never physically sleep, or is it a metaphor for something else?

What will you take away from the final section as an encouragement and a challenge for the year ahead?

How do you feel as we reach the end of this letter, what will you take away?

### Time for prayer