

#### DAY ONE—A GOSPEL LETTER

On this first day, let us begin by noting that we are reading an epistle, a letter sent from the apostle Paul to the young Thessalonian church that he had planted through his preaching of the gospel in their city, as we shall read. Paul (now in Corinth) has just received a good report from Timothy, whom he sent to see how the Thessalonians were doing (I Thess. 3:6). The apostle Paul rejoices to hear of their perseverance in the faith and desires to guide them into a clearer understanding of that faith.

Paul opens with a customary salutation (I Thess. I:I), acknowledging the presence and greetings (and probably secretarial help) of his companions Silvanus (Latin for "Silas") and Timothy, both of whom had been to Thessalonica as well.

 In I Thessalonians I:I, notice in whom Paul understands the church to exist. How do Paul's words of greeting confirm from the start just who is this Jesus that Paul

has preached to the Thessalonians? Note: The word "Christ" means literally "anointed one" or "Messiah."

2. It will be helpful, initially, to read through I Thessalonians as a letter should be read: from beginning to end. Do a rather quick first read, straight through the five chapters of this epistle. When you have taken it in as a whole, jot down themes and observations that stand out to you on this first reading. As you begin to grasp the shape of the letter, you may want to consult the suggested outline in the back of this study.

### DAY TWO—STARTING WITH THE GOSPEL

On first reading, one large theme that emerges is the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ—the day of the Lord. Paul often mentions that day throughout the letter and focuses on it in I Thessalonians 4 and 5. But that day is the culmination of the gospel story, and Paul starts not there but back at the beginning: with the planting of the gospel in the hearts of these new believers.

I. First, list all the various factors involved in the Thessalonians' initial receiving of the gospel (I Thess. I:4-6).

2. Look through this wonderful list, which only begins to uncover the huge drama of a soul coming to faith. What do you notice, and how do you respond?

3. Now read Luke's historical account in Acts 17:1–10. How does this passage more specifically explain the *gospel* to which Paul refers in 1 Thessalonians 1:5?

4. What other details from Acts 17:I-IO help fill out Paul's summary of the Thessalonians' conversion in I Thessalonians I:4-6?

# DAY THREE—GOSPEL RAMIFICATIONS

I. What various things do you see happening in Paul in the course of his relationship with these Thessalonians (I Thess. I:2-8)?

2. How, perhaps, have you known or seen such effects of sharing the gospel? How might these effects offer an answer to the loneliness and alienation experienced by so many today?

3. Clearly, things were happening not only in Paul but also in the Thessalonians! List and comment on the three weighty phrases Paul uses in I Thessalonians I:3. How might they together summarize the work of the gospel in our lives? How do they all make sense only because of the verse's final phrase?

4. According to I Thessalonians I:6–8, what further specific evidences of gospel life are found in these Thessalonians? *In what ways do these verses challenge you?* 

### DAY FOUR—THE GOSPEL'S SHAPE

In a powerful conclusion to this introductory section of his letter, Paul sums up the whole shape of a gospel life as evidenced in these new believers: *turning*, *serving*, and *waiting* (I Thess. I:9–IO).

I. We can see how turning to God from idols might well have been literally true for the many Gentile converts in Thessalonica, and how it is still true in many parts of the world today. How is this turning a true and necessary step for every person who comes to faith in the one living and true God? See also Ephesians 2:1–3.

2. The turning is not only *from* but also *to*. To *serve* carries the connotations of slave service, which makes sense when we see the one served. What do we know about this God from I Thessalonians I:9–IO?

3. The service is a means of active waiting—not for something but rather for someone. Paul will unpack this truth further in these two letters, but, for now, from I Thessalonians I:IO, what truths do we know about the one for whom we wait? Note: It had been less than twenty years since Jesus' disciples had seen him die on the cross, rise again, and ascend into heaven. Review that promise of the angels at his ascension in Acts 1:6—11.

4. How much is or is not your life summed up by this turning, serving, and waiting (and by this work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope)? In what ways would you like more actively to embrace this whole shape of the gospel in your life?

### DAY FIVE—LOOKING BACK

I. Reread the whole flow of this week's passage, I Thessalonians I:I—IO. Having studied it in detail, now write down several concluding thoughts and observations concerning Paul's joyful summation of the work of the gospel in the Thessalonians' lives.

2. How are words and the word important in this first chapter of I Thessalonians? What different kinds of words do you find here? Words connected with what?

3. This opening passage offers just the first in many examples of Paul as a man of prayer. Look back through I Thessalonians I, asking what prayers might grow in you as you read these verses. What prayers does this first chapter stimulate in your mind and heart? Write down your own prayer or prayers based on this passage.

