



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
March 15, 2020

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-5

Series: Real Christians in Challenging Times

Well we're going to look at 1 Thessalonians. So this is our new slide for 1 Thessalonians while we're working on it. But I want to ask a very important question in our study and this is the question: What empowers you to keep going in life? That question will be answered now as we start looking at our passage. So what empowers us to keep going in life? We're going to find the answer in this passage. It's so appropriate for our situations that we live in right today as God's word always is. So in order to do that, let's read the scripture so that we understand what God is saying.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5 – Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you and constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

I feel like saying you may seated, but obviously you're already sitting down.

1 Thessalonians, a great passage. But I have to tell you this story. In your book there is a page that comes before where it says 1 Thessalonians 1. There is a blank page before that and I'm going to tell you some introductory materials that leads into the book of 1 Thessalonians so that you have the historical background and you understand what's happening.

In order to do that, I want to show you a map and I'm going to lead into this. This story (and you can write this on the page there) of the 1 Thessalonians church takes place in Acts 17. So you can look at Acts 17 and read the whole story. Let me summarize it for you. First let me show you this map.

Now in the map we have Paul's missionary journeys. Paul started this second missionary journey by going up into this whole area in here in Galatia. So he's headed up in to the Galatia area and while he's there he hears from the Lord. He believes or he thinks that this is a good thing to do. So he's going down into some other areas, but the Bible says the Spirit of Jesus prevented him. So I'm saying to myself wow. There's sometimes when I think I know what God wants us to do. He wants us to meet at this new facility that would be provided for us. This must be God's direction. I get real excited about it. But then as I continue on, the Spirit of Jesus prevents me from doing that and I realize it must be something else. God is leading and sometimes it's hard to know exactly what He has. So Paul is trying to decide that and what is best for him.

So he goes down to Troas (the coast there) and then from Troas he sees a vision from a man from Macedonia saying come over here to Philippi. So he goes up to Philippi where he meets a woman, Lydia. She comes to know the Lord and her whole household, her family comes to know the Lord. And then the Philippian jailor who came to know the Lord, he had a household too. It says his whole household was baptized. So the church was born in Philippi. Paul stayed there for a little while, but then he had to move on.

So when he had to escape from Philippi because people were trying to hurt him, then he moved on to Thessalonica. Thessalonica becomes this city where he stays for only four weeks. He's only there for four weeks before he has to go. This is part of the miracle it seems to me. This is why the passage is so powerful. What helped the church grow? He planted a church in four weeks and has to disappear because he's being attacked by the business people in the community. In fact he has a very strong message.

Here's what he says to them. He says in Acts 17:3 – *This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.* So he has a very bold message. And then the statement that they make in attacking him and bringing accusation against him is this: *These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.* That's the accusation. That's quite a testimony too of what God is doing in their lives. Yes, they did turn the world upside-down. That's what we do as Christians. We turn the world upside-down. I loved that picture that happened in Thessalonica.

The Bible tells us that he reasoned with them in the synagogue for three Sabbaths. But then the opposition grew strong and he had to run away from that town. So you can see he went down to Berea. He was there for a little bit before those from Thessalonica came down to get him out of there and raise some more concerns. So he had to run away or left the city. He left Timothy and Silas in Berea and he came all the way down here to Athens and then on to Corinth.

He spent about a year-and-a-half in Corinth and while he was there in Corinth he was waiting. What happened to Silas and Timothy, he's wondering. I wonder what they're doing up there? I wonder what happened to the church in Thessalonica?

Well during that period of time finally Silas came down with Timothy, they met Paul, and Paul got to hear the story. He was so pleased to hear the story of what happened in Thessalonica. Because what happened was the church was flourishing. They didn't even have Paul there to do this. This is what's so amazing. God comes into a person's life, then God comes into another person's life and so on; they start gathering together and God grows the church together in a powerful way. Because it's not dependent on a person. God's church will continue whether it's in China or Brazil or Nigeria or in Robbinsville. God's church is big and God's church is powerful and God did amazing work in them.

So Paul is listening to all of this and he's so excited about this he decides to write his first letter. 1 Thessalonians is the first letter he wrote. He's written many other letters to the churches, but he says I've got to write to them. When he writes to them he writes these words that we read this morning, 1 Thessalonians 1.

So turn your page over to 1 Thessalonians 1 where you can write on the side, but I encourage you to actually mark up the parts here. What you can do...if you look at the passage again where it says – *Paul, Silvanus* (now that's another name for Silas) *and Timothy* – so you can mark those and just write above them these are the authors of the book. *To the church of the Thessalonians* (those are the receivers) *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. And the greeting is: *Grace to you and peace*. So you might mark the *grace to you and peace* as the greeting that he's giving to them.

But notice how it moves next. *We thank God always for all of you*. Paul was a prayer and he thanked God continually for them.

Now we continue on and this is where it becomes so important. *Continually mentioning you in our prayers, remembering*. So he's going to remember what they saw in their lives and he's going to remember what he experienced with them and he's going to help us understand what is it that helps us keep going in life. What is it that helps us stay in tune with what God is doing in a particular situation. We need this message. So when we ask the question what is God going to do in our lives, we're looking at this passage and it's giving us some very specific answers.

Now I'm going to go through this, but I want you to jump down to the part where it says because. *Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power*. So I would suggest that what empowers you to keep going in life is gospel power. The gospel power enables you to be able to grasp this something inside of your own heart and what God wants for you. So when you think about this gospel power, you want to think about what is that and how can you embrace it. God wants to give it to you. Paul is saying you guys received this, you had it, and you received it in these three different ways. He's going to show us how this gospel power is encouraged by three things he remembers about them, and how he's remembering these things in his prayer to the Lord. Maybe some of this he's told by Timothy and Silas. But he says here's three things that have guided you in your life that have encouraged this gospel power. He's so excited to share those things with them.

So let's go back to our passage and see what those things are. Look at verse 3 where we're going to spend a lot of our time today. It says in verse 3 – *remembering before our God and Father* (three things) *your work of faith, the labor of love, and the steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*. We're going to talk about all of those.

The first one is faith. Let's talk about that faith. Because what happens is the faith is one of God's tools that fuels this gospel power that you and I need. We need this power. I need more power in my life. I need this gospel power to empower me to deal with every day, to manage myself, my own anxieties, my own challenges. I need this power to help me to be bold in challenging people about their faith. I need this power to work with family members or to do work. I mean all these things come from this gospel power. One of the tools that God has given us is faith. Faith is this ability to trust the Lord when things are good and when things are not good. Some people think God is only present in the light. And that's great. God is present in the light, but He's also present in the darkness. Sometimes we can learn more in the darkness than we can learn in the light. We need to learn how to have faith in the Lord in the midst of that.

A woman told me this week she was discouraged. She lives in New York City and all the clamping down and so on, she was feeling discouraged about that. She was also feeling discouraged that the work with her children wasn't going the way that she'd like and she wanted some comment from me. I said, "You know, what you need to do is you need to rely on God's faithfulness. You want to realize how much God has done for you and how God has been faithful to you so many times."

We always need to recognize when we are in the dark and we don't see as clearly. The faithfulness of God in the light. To recognize that God is faithful and we trust in Him, even when there's dark moments in our lives. Faith is one of those things that God has given us as a tool so that we can grow, so that we can empower that gospel power inside of us. That God can do some things. So we can keep taking steps every day in our lives. How are you going to keep going every day? You're going to do that with faith. God wants to build our faith. He wants to strengthen our faith. In fact I would suggest that we need to create a note-to-self. Note to self: Get more faith. Because I think that the amount of faith that we need to live every day is bigger than what we have. We need more faith in order to move forward.

Now Mark 9:23-24 is so helpful for us. Because what happens in this passage is a man comes to Jesus with his sick son and Jesus said to him – *"If you can. All things are possible for one who believes."* So just believe, have faith. And *immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"* I think that's just what we need. We need this idea, we need this understanding, we need this tool that faith is something that I need, but I don't have enough of it. I do not have enough faith to deal with life the way it's coming at me. I don't have faith to extend myself to other people in a way that's productive. I think we need to come to that realization.

I find in this passage that when Paul is saying to them that you need to have this faith in your life, he's talking about something that's bigger than they have. He's remembering something they had, but God's going to do something much bigger, so they're going to grow in their faith and become stronger in it. So it's a work of faith. So he talks in the passage it's a work of faith. The working that we do comes from faith. I think this is a faith that works. It's not just a faith that we have that's a belief system. When we use the word 'faith' sometimes we talk about our faith and the things we believe. That's not how it's used here. This is an active sense that God has given us a tool. This tool is faith to work out some more things.

See, when you're experiencing anxiety in your life and you're trying to get rid of that, one of the ways you do that is by turning it over to the Lord. That you're entrusting Him with something. You're working out this faith and you're using this tool that God has given you to be able to take the next steps. I just ask the question and this is the question I think we're asking today: What can I do to continually step forward and move forward in my life? One of the tools God has given us is this faith. So that's why we see note-to-self: Get more faith.

The second one has to do with love. In this passage we're learning more about love. What is this love? This is the word *agapé* love. I talked to you a couple times ago about this love. Here it says in this passage in verse 3 – *Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and your labor of love.* So the labor that you do comes to you from this sense of love that you have for

other people. Now when we talked about love a few weeks ago and we talked about marriage, I defined this *agapé* love in this way: Commitment and delight and sacrifice. So those are the three parts of this love. I think it's important to understand that.

Sometimes people think when they come to *agapé* love in the Bible *agapé* is one of the words. If you've been around the Christian community, you've heard that. And they think oh *agapé* love is Christ love. It's God's love and it doesn't have feelings attached to it. It's doing the right thing even if I don't feel like it because I'm committed to that person. Well there's some benefit to that line of thinking, but if we see how the word *agapé* is used in the Bible it's not only Christian love. In 1 John 2 it says – *Do not love the world*. That's not Christian love, he's saying, but that's the word *agapé*. In John 3:19 it says – *Men love darkness rather than light*. That's the word *agapé* there. What is he saying? He's saying that their delight, their focus that they have is on something. So Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment and the answer was *the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength*. Turn your heart toward the Lord and focus in on Him that your passion is for God, you're loving Him. And *love your neighbor as yourself*.

So this motivation that we have every day is a motivation of love. That's what we do as Christians. When you get up in the morning, your motivation to work with your children is a motivation of love. When you go to work, your motivation is love. When you do whatever you're doing, there's this motivation of sacrifice, of commitment, of delight. And as you do that it's another one of these tools that empowers the gospel in your life so that you can take steps every day. This isn't about me. It's not about you. It's about taking steps and God motivates us with love. In fact Jesus says – *They will know you are my disciples by your love*. There's this powerful motivation inside of our hearts to do what's right. As we love, we fuel inside of us even more this gospel power that God has for us.

Think in terms of the love that God has. I think it's so big we can't do it. I do not have enough love in my life to move forward, to do all that I need to do. So I would suggest we need more of that. In Ephesians 3 Paul says to the Ephesians (look at how much love is mentioned here) – *And I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power (again the word power is used there, interestingly enough), together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and how long and how deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be fulfilled to the measure of all the fullness of God*.

I don't think we have enough love, so we need a note-to-self which says get more love. I think this is one of those things Paul is saying as he's remembering the Thessalonians. That you need to stay in tune with the Lord and his gospel power that He's given you. One of those tools to do that is the love of God. And it's much bigger than we have. So we're on this continual pursuit to grow in our ability to love and it becomes our motivation to move forward.

Let's go to our third element, this element of hope. When we look at this idea of hope, we're talking about a hope that is... Well let's look back at the passage again. Notice it says in verse 3 – *Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope*. Steadfastness of hope.

The word *steadfast*...and you can write the Greek word there. Circle *steadfast* and bring it over into the margin. Write that the word is *hupomeno*. You can spell it any way you want to because it's Greek letters...you're just transliterating, so it doesn't make a difference how you spell it. *Hupomeno*. It's made from two Greek words brought together – *hupo* means under and *meno* means to remain. To remain under. Steadfast. To remain under the pressure is the idea.

Another word that's used here is endurance. We have endurance and where does that endurance come from? It comes from our hope. Our hope that God is working in our lives. That God will work in the good times and God will work in the dark times. To recognize that God is at work and my love is pointed toward Him no matter what happens. My faith is invested in him no matter what happens. This hope then that grows inside of us is a result of our positioning. Where we position ourselves is strategic and it allows us to remain under the pressure, *hupomeno*. Steadfastness of hope or steadfastness that comes from hope in our lives. God gives us hope.

We know the end of the story. We know what's going to happen. God is working in our lives. We have a hope that God is in control and God is good. We know that. It's just a tremendous way for us to keep our focus moving the right direction and to be moving where God wants us to work.

Now we've looked at those three different words and when it comes to hope we say this in Romans 15:13 – *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power (interesting the word is used there again) of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope*. Note to self: We need more hope. Because I'm convinced that the hope that we need is much broader than what we possess. In fact I believe that the faith and the love and the hope that God would have us to develop in our lives is bigger than what we need even for our own situations. Like sometimes God allows us to be in situations that are challenging in order to stretch us in those ways. In fact what God has done is He's put these three things together in a way that we can't really accomplish on our own. We need more. And where are we going to get that? Where are we going to get the love and the faith and the hope? Where is it going to come from? The passage in 1 Thessalonians tells us we're looking at the words in the passage because we want to see where is that coming from? Where are we getting it from?

In order to show you this idea of where we get it from I'm going to show you one of those pictures that I want you to ask the question what's wrong with this picture. So I'm going to show you a picture and I want you to say where am I getting my hope and my faith and my love? Look at this picture. What's wrong with this picture? Do we get our faith and our hope and our love from the news services? I think sometimes when there's a problem in our world we invest a lot of our energy into the news and we have it running continually and it kind of drains us of hope and drains us of faith and drains us of love. I think it's important for us as believers to be informed. But there's a difference between being informed and meditating on the news. When you hear the same story over and over again in a different ways... I mean newscasters have to figure out how they're going to talk about this a different way, so it's continually looking at something over and over and over again. It's challenging for us. So be careful about where you're getting your faith, hope, and love.

Let's go back into the passage and see. Because I think you're going to see the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all mentioned in this passage which become the sources for this faith and hope and love that we all need. Let's look at the passage. Notice it says in verse 3 – *Remembering before our God and Father (there's the Father) your work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*

What we're doing is we're trusting in God. We can't say...and some people will say, psychologists will often say, "You've got to believe." Believe is important. It's like they're saying believe in believing or believe in faith. We don't do that as Christians. Our faith is in something that is rock solid. It's in God Himself. That when we're loving, we're not doing it just to be loving people. We're doing it because love comes from God. It's as if our hearts are so open to the Lord and we're saying, "God, give me more." So it passes through us so that we can carry it out and bless other people with it. This hope that we need is so big. Where are we going to find this hope? We're going to find it in the Lord. God wants to do something powerful in our lives and we want to be a part of that. So we're gaining our strength from God and we're allowing Him to work in our lives.

Look back at the passage where it talks about this gospel. He says – *Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power.* We need that power. That gospel comes to us in power that helped that church in Thessalonica to grow quickly, helped the church become the church without Paul's leadership.

God wants to do supernatural things in our lives. He wants to bless us, He wants to empower us, He wants to do things through us. God wants to do great things. We have to trust in Him and we have to rely on Him. Where do we get our hope and our faith and our love? It really comes from our relationship with God and what He wants to do deeper inside of our lives.

The word *gospel* used there (and you can circle the word *gospel* and draw a line across) is the word *euangelion* which means good news. We need good news. Notice that the gospel produces that power. *It came to you not only as words, but also in power.* Now when you're trying to understand more about the faith and grow in your faith, you do need to have the word. So it comes in word, but it also comes in power.

There are about 200 Bible stories, I understand, and it's good to know them. So understanding the word, memorizing some scriptures that are helpful, that's good. Knowing some theology and how that helps you to relate to God and to yourself and to our world mission, all of that is helpful. So the word part is important. That's the academics in that. That's the facts.

But now he's saying it also comes in power and that's the experience. That God wants to breathe life into you in a powerful way. He wants to give you power so that you can live today. So you will not be under the circumstances. You'll live under *hupomeno*, but you'll do it with steadfastness of hope. That there's this encouragement that you experience in your life. God wants to do some great things.

I would encourage you as you're trusting in the Lord and building your trust in these challenging times, that you focus in on what God wants to give you. Say, "God I need more," and then go to Him. Spend some time in the word. Spend some time trusting in Him. Allow Him to do work in your life. And then be bold.

Notice the last word there that they had *power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction*. Their power was something that enabled them to have convictions and boldness and move forward. We're going to see a lot more in this book about how to live today every day with the power of God. How to live in a challenging world as the Thessalonians lived in a challenging place in their world, but they were able to trust the Lord. I need that. What are you going to do to take the next steps in your life to follow the Lord? It comes through developing this understanding of gospel power and what God wants to do.

I hope you'll go out of this service today being the church and you'll hold your head up high. Because you have a faith that's bigger. You have a love that's bigger. You have a hope that's bigger. And God wants to do something amazing and big in your life. Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we're grateful for all the things you give us and we thank you for the spiritual strength that you provide for us in times of challenge. We ask, Lord, that you would encourage us and grow us. That you'd help us to be a light to those around who are weak and just need the support that we can give them. Give us the boldness to share our faith with others and to help them to understand what you're doing. So we ask, Lord, that you would bless each of my brothers and sisters here. Thank you for Calvary Chapel Living Hope and the church that we are. We ask that you would do a deep work in all of our lives. And we'll glorify you, Lord. We'll tell others about what you're doing because we want to honor you. In Jesus' name, amen.