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1 THESSALONIANS 1:5-10

Series: Real Christians in Challenging Times

We started the study in 1 Thessalonians. I mailed all these books out to you so you can take notes. You have a place right in the very beginning to write the information about the book and how the book was started right in the very first page before we get to 1 Thessalonians 1. But then you have the scripture written here and I would encourage you to write on this page. Circle it. Circle the things that are important. Draw lines from this page over to this page where you can keep track of your notes. Use this as a study guide so that not only will you have the text and the interpretation of the text, but applications. What is God saying to you? Maybe there's something that I say or you hear the Lord say to you through the passage today and you'll write it there and highlight it. Keep track of those things. Because this you will be able to look back on in six months or a year. It will go on your shelf and you'll say, "Wow, I want to know what I was thinking back there during that period of time in my life." What a great opportunity for you to see a spiritual journal as you're interacting. Write prayer requests. Write down challenges that you're experiencing so that you can come back later and see wow, God worked that out. Look at what He did. Look at what He taught me in that passage of scripture.

So I'm going to be sharing with you some very specific things from 1 Thessalonians 1. If you don't have one of these booklets, I'd encourage you to open up your Bible. We're using the English Standard Version of the Bible in this study because that's what these booklets are written in and you'll see that in texts. I'm going to throw the text up on the screen for you as we go and you'll be able to watch us go through the passage and we'll talk about it as we do. Our goal is to look for practical applications for ourselves.

You see, in 1 Thessalonians it is such a great book for us to study because it is a book that's helping people know how to be real Christians in challenging times. What does it mean to be an authentic believer? What does it mean to be genuine in our relationship with the Lord? That's what we're talking about here in the book of 1 Thessalonians. So it's an ideal book for us to be studying during challenging times and you're going to find some practical application as we go through this.

Now in the first few verses that we looked at last week, we saw that the thing that keeps us going every day in life is this gospel power. A power that exists inside of the gospel that drives us forward. It's a power that comes from knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We exercise that gospel power, we saw last week, in three ways: With faith and hope and love. So if you look at those, they're in verse 3 of 1 Thessalonians 1. Those are the three things that are exercising this power and it comes out now in some very important ways. We want to be prepared in our lives. We want to have a spiritual vitality and I want to share with you what that spiritual vitality

looks like. But let's first look at the scriptures now. Let me read to you our passage for today. Then I'm going to take it apart and we'll talk about it.

1 Thessalonians 1. It says – *You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 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. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

This is a passage that's talking about spiritual vitality. See Paul only spent about three, four weeks probably in Thessalonica before he had to move on. He left Timothy and Silas in Thessalonica. Actually he left them in Berea, so they could probably hear what was going on in Thessalonica. But he moved all the way down to Corinth and he waited and he waited. For months he waited for word to find out how they were doing. When he heard they were doing well as reported from Timothy and Silas, he was so eager he wrote his first epistle. This is Paul's first epistle and it's to the Thessalonians. He's so excited to say to them I am so grateful for your spiritual vitality.

What does spiritual vitality look like in our lives? I want to look at that for a moment because I think that's going to help us right now experience that vitality in the midst of challenges that we experience in our lives. Notice I want you to see how they positioned themselves. If you look in the passage again, down here it says that they became *imitators*, and then I've underlined that word and the word *example*. I'd encourage you to underline both of those words because the Thessalonians were right in the middle of being imitators and they were an example. It's great.

Let me explain to you what this looks like because I think this is the best position that we could be in as believers. You want to be in this position and I think you can be easily in this position in your life today. To be used by the Lord with spiritual vitality by being an imitator and an example.

The word imitator is the word 'mimic' or *mimeomai* where we get our word 'mimic' from. It's the idea of imitating someone. Notice it says in the passage *imitators of us and the Lord*. So as believers we need to be focusing in on the Lord and other believers that we can imitate. Because we're learning how do we live this life as Christians. How do we live under pressure as believers. So we're imitating. We're looking for ways to see how other people, other Christians are living their lives and we're applying that. It's providing us with strength so that we can turn around and be examples.

Notice the word *example* there. You can write in your little side margin there that example comes from the Greek word *tupos* which is a type. It's the idea of being a type. So this idea of being an example is something we all are. Now get the idea of what that means for you and me. We're gathering. We're like open funnels for the Lord to give us His grace and we're seeing that in other people so we know how to live and we turn around and exemplify it for other people to

see. Well other people didn't understand and know about God's grace. We want them to see and understand how we can experience peace in troubled times or the joy we're going to see later on in this passage.

God has given us something that's very powerful. So we want to be drawing from the Lord in our relationship from Him. We want to imitate God. We want to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ as He suffered in trial so we can imitate His response to them. We can imitate other people who are believers and learn from them, and then we can turn around and we can be an example to other people. So what we want to do is look at the ways we're going to do that.

Notice if you see the Christian vitality and in that Christian vitality notice that there are four things that we are seeing. There are others-centered, Bible-powered, under pressure, and there's supernatural joy. I'm going to take you back into the passage to see those in a minute, but I just wanted to draw them out so you can see them here. Others-centered, Bible-powered, under pressure, supernatural joy. Let's go back and see them in the passage.

You see in verse 5 Paul says to them – *You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.* He was others-centered. In times of crisis, in times of persecution, in uncertain times, people have a tendency to focus on themselves. They make unwise decisions. They don't care about others. But as Christians we're different. You see we're imitators of Paul in that we are thinking about others. We are others-centered.

Notice what else it says in the passage in verse 6. It says – *you received the word.* So what we're doing in our relationship with other people is we're basing them on this foundation of God's word. What a great time to have more time in God's word, to understand more about what He's doing and how He's working in our lives. But we come from God's word. The truths that you're hearing today, you want to tie them into the actual passage so that you're learning from the passage of God's word. That's what's going to inspire you and empower you. It's from the word of God that they embraced.

And notice it was under pressure. *In much affliction,* it says in verse 6. And that affliction in their case was pressure from society. The marketplace and also from the political leaders that said we're going to put pressure on you. So they didn't like Paul and all of his friends. So there was all of this kind of social pressure placed on them. Yet they received the word, even under pressure. If you're feeling pressure today, you really need to spend time in God's word and reading the passages in the Bible that will encourage you and train you so that you have something that you can turn around and exemplify to other people.

And then notice in the end of verse 6 it says *with the joy of the Holy Spirit.* There's something that happens when you study the word and you're imitating other people, there's a joy that takes place inside of us that we have and we can share. We look different. As other people are seeing us, we look different than other people look. So that's this first point about being an example.

I just find in my interactions going around as I've gone shopping or as I've just been at home or in the neighborhood, there are a lot of anxious people. So I want to share with you something that we did this week. We created this document. This is a little letter, a half-sheet piece of paper,

two up, we cut them in half, and we took them around to our neighborhood, 150 homes in our neighborhood. I want to read to you what it says because we're trying to be a light right around in our neighborhood. It says this:

Hi neighbor,

Well we're in interesting times with the whole COVID19 situation with lots of anxiety and fear in our community about where it's all headed. It's hard to tell what the next days, weeks, and months have in store for us. But whatever the case, we think it's a good time to push in to being neighbors. We don't have a whole lot stockpiled, but we may have something we can share with you if you're in a pinch. Likely you have a good support system, but it's often helpful to have a neighbor you can call on as well. Anyway, if you do need something or you want to talk more about ways we can help each other, shoot us an email at scott@takejesushome.com or carrie@carrieturansky.com. We're at 76 Hopatcong Drive just down the street. Know that we're praying for you, this block and our neighborhood, as we go through this together. Blessings,
Scott and Carrie Turansky

Now as soon as we put that out there we started getting positive responses. We had a lady waving from her doorway. Because what we did was we just stuck them underneath the mat. We didn't put them in mailboxes because that isn't legal. But we put them under the mat where it says "hi neighbor" sticking out and then people picked them up and found them. And people waved at us. Yesterday I was on a walk. We did this on Thursday and Friday. I was on a walk yesterday and a lady said, "That was a really good letter you put out." So she recognized me and made that statement.

But here's some comments that people sent via email since we put our email addresses there. "What a thoughtful gesture to walk home after a very long day at work to find this lovely note. Every day we are reminded of the goodness and the love all around us. This is a perfect way to check on one another while still practicing social distancing. It's nice to know we can build our own support systems in our neighborhood. We are also willing and available to help those in need. My husband works at ShopRite and is also able to bring things home as they become available. If there is a need we can look into it." This is from someone 82, about several houses down from us on our same street.

Here's another email somebody sent: "Thank you for reaching out. I thought of the same thing, but you beat me to it. We are totally on board to also help anyone in need. Like you we did not stockpile, but we are willing to share." This is someone on the next street over.

Here's another response: "Good afternoon. I have to say, that was the sweetest note we have ever received. I really appreciate your kindness. We are all good, but do have stuff if you need it as well." And here is somebody else on our street.

I would just suggest that people are looking for something. That people need the support and encouragement that we have to offer. What we want to do is we want to share. I would encourage you to somehow be a light. Maybe put a sign out in your front yard or something, some way to communicate that you are different than everyone else. That you have a joy, this joy of the Holy Spirit inside of you that allows you to extend yourself beyond all the chaos and uncertainty that's going on in our world.

Well let's see what happens as the passage develops. Go to verse 8 because it says – *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.*

The word *sounded forth* you can just draw a line over, circle that word. It means to echo out. To spread the news. It's like ripples going out. I think it's a good way to describe what we're seeing in the passage. That we have the imitators that we're watching. So we're trying to look at people who are doing a good job at living the Christian life under pressure, and then we are exemplifying that. It's like a ripple effect that goes forward on so that other people can see it. There's a sense that you are the gospel according to...and put your name in there. The gospel according to Scott. There's a gospel according to Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, and of course those are inspired gospels that we draw from the word of God. But sometimes the gospel that people see is the gospel according to Scott or Carrie or Bill or Susan. You are the gospel and people are seeing the gospel in you and it is sounding out. What does that gospel look like? You represent something very powerful to people in need.

It reminds me of a story of a time when I lived in Kenya. While I was in Kenya I was teaching at a Bible college. But during that time the Miller family came over to visit us for a couple of weeks. When the Miller family came over to visit, Joanne and I had been teaching parenting seminars. So we decided that our families would go out into the bush. And when I say bush I mean out into a very rural area where they don't speak any English. So we had translators come with us and we had prepared in advance. There was a church there that was going to have a parenting seminar. Had never heard of anything before like that. So we went out into this area where it was so rural they hadn't ever seen white children before. So we were out there pretty distant from what we would call civilization.

When they introduced us and we got up to speak, now you have to understand Joanne Miller and I teach in a tandem fashion. So I'm teaching and then my translator would translate what I said, and then Joanne would teach and the translator would speak. So it's a dialogue format. So we're going pretty fast here as we're all each speaking and so on. But occasionally something strange would happen. I'd be right into what I was saying and I'd be talking about sharing it and when I shared it and paused for the translator to repeat, nothing came out. Everything stopped. I looked over and the translator goes, "Oh. Oh yeah." See what happened was the translator got so interested in what I was saying that he forgot to translate. The process of transmission of the message stopped with him. He was the translator. He was the one that was posting the information and moving it on farther.

So I think that happens in our lives sometimes, doesn't it? We're the translators where people hear the message of the gospel and sometimes we pause. Maybe because we like the gospel message so much or maybe it's because we're distracted by life and we don't share it with other people. So there's this pause in people's lives that are waiting for the message. I would suggest that this idea here in our passage of sounding forth or echoing forth is exactly what needs to take place.

And what's the message? If you go down to verse 9 here's the message they heard. It says in verse 9 – *they turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God*. Notice they turned to God from idols.

Let's talk about idols for just a moment. Because the idols they had were ones made of stone or wood or even metal. They would make these idols and they had idols for all kinds of things. There were so many idols all around that it became if you had a challenge it must mean to create another idol. And people worshiped all these different idols that they had.

Now idols don't have to be made of wood or stone or metal. A definition of an idol is anything that we worship, anything that we bow down to, anything that we give our life to. I would suggest that there are some people today who idolize the stock market or idolize their personal financial security or they idolize their health or they idolize some form of life that they have made stable that is now unstable and they can't control it. I think we need to watch out for the idols in our lives. Sometimes we find ourselves worshiping things that are getting us into trouble.

Notice they turned from idols to God to serve the living and true God. There's only one God that we can embed ourselves that we stand on, that we can rely on. It's the true and the living God that can't be destroyed by circumstances. It can't be hindered by anything going around in our society or the challenges we're facing. We face the living and true God. The God that has saved us, that it gives us what we need. And people out there need that today. They're feeling anxious. They don't know where to turn. They don't know what to say and they don't know how to respond. We have a message. That message is resounding forth and that message is this message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's this power in the gospel that keeps us going and it's this power that's the message that we share with others. So if you're going to demonstrate Christian vitality, if you're going to be prepared to handle life situations, you're going to communicate the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There's one more idea in this passage I'd like to look at. Notice down in verse 10. In verse 10 it says that we are to wait *and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come*. To wait. This is a real fun Greek word, so I just want to take it apart for you and compare it to one we looked at last week. This is the word *anameno*. *Anameno*. It's made up of two words. *Meno* is to remain; *ana* is up. To remain up.

But I want to go back to last week when we looked in verse, so if you turn back the page to verse 3 and it says the word for *steadfast in hope* or remaining under. That was *hupomeno*. To remain under the pressure of life yet to still have hope. That's what steadfastness is in verse 3. Now we get to verse 10 and we have the same word *meno* remain, but now instead of *hupo* remain under, now it's remain up. In other words remain expectant. That we're looking forward to something. Because in our lives we are now bound to earthly things that are going on. We're not bound to the cloud that can cover us and cause us to not see the sunshine. We're like the airplane that flies through the cloud, can see the sun as bright as day, and we can see that God is doing amazing things. We are waiting for the sun to come back again from heaven. We have our eyes fixed on Jesus. You know the verse in Hebrews 12 which says – *We run this race with our eyes fixed on Jesus*. We're not looking around at all of the challenges. Our eyes are fixed on Jesus. Not

entangled by sin. We are running a race. And when we are waiting, we have this *anameno* relationship with Jesus. We're anticipating good things. We're anticipating what He's doing.

We definitely are different than most people around. You see there's a lot of people waiting for things. Waiting to get out of their homes. Waiting for an all clear. Waiting for the statistics to go down. Waiting to flatten the curve. All of those things that are very important things to be waiting for. But we're not limited to that. We're waiting for Jesus Christ. We're excited about what He's going to do in our lives. There's something about that that changes the dynamic. That we carry with us the weather. We're not dependent on the weather. We carry it with us into every situation because God is at work in our lives in a very powerful way. So we want to remain up or expectant as we're thinking about what God has for us.

I want to read to you something I found in Facebook from a missionary from Wuhan. As you know Wuhan is where this whole coronavirus situation started. So she's sharing a Facebook post and I'm going to read it to you. It's a little bit long, but listen to this because I think it's inspiring. It's one of those things we can imitate someone else. As we're being imitators, I think this lady is a great person to imitate.

She says this:

"It's roughly Day 48 of the city's quarantine. We've been locked in our apartment complex for many weeks. I haven't eaten out since January 19th. We're living in such strange times. After my last post, which was all about locks on doors and further restrictions, my husband asked me if I posted anything good. That convicted me. So from the epicenter of the coronavirus, here is just some of the good we have been experiencing because of the lockdown.

Our family life has never been better. Usually one weekend is long enough before I'm ready to send each of us back to school or work. But for seven weeks we've been home together with very little outside influence or distraction, forced to reconnect with one another, learn how to communicate better, to give each other space, to slow down our pace, and be a stronger family than ever before.

We've learned how to accept help from others. During this time we've had to rely on others to show us how to get food and other things we need. People here are so good and they want to help. It's satisfying to accept the help.

Shopping is so much easier now. It comes straight to our complex and we just pick it up. Simple.

Right now I hear birds outside my window on the 25th floor. I used to think there weren't really birds in Wuhan because you rarely saw them and never heard them. I now know they were just muted and crowded out by the traffic and people. All day now long I hear birds singing. It stops me in my tracks to hear the sound of their wings.

Spring in Wuhan is absolutely stunning. God has been giving us glimpses of the beauty to come with near perfect weather. Because of lockdown we get to watch spring slowly unfold right in front of us with no work, traffic, pollution, or other distractions. I've pulled up my chair and I'm ready for the Creator's show.

My cooking has gotten way more creative. I'm cooking like a home-settler. Housekeeping hasn't suffered either.

We take naps in the middle of the day sometimes. We've all been reading so much more than before. I've reconnected with lots of old friends. We've talked with our families more than ever before. We still work and do school, but all from home and all in flexible hours. It's not perfect, but it's fairly productive and good.

We are exercising more because we borrowed a rowing machine from school right before the lockdown. I still walk in the morning as usual and I do so with no time restrictions and now with my friend Erica.

My prayer life has never been better and my study time has been much more real. I have quiet times that are actually usually quiet and I can devote real time to it. Most days I have so much more time to think, to listen, to process, and to discover. I'm discovering the good gifts that God has given to me and my family. More than anything I'm bowled over by His goodness at every turn. He overwhelms me with His goodness.

We had church by Zoom this morning at 10:30 as usual. My husband just woke up from his nap, my kids are reading quietly on the couch. I have the luxury of writing uncensored here on Facebook. We are about to go pick up a ham that a friend is giving us, taking her our coffee and cranberries to share. God has provided...

[Abrupt stop to audio]

I want to share with you some very practical insights about how we should respond to people or not respond to people in the midst of the challenges that we're experiencing. I know that in our regular Sunday morning time that we just finished we got cut off for some reason. We're not sure why that was cut off. But I want to share with you some ideas that I think will help you. So I'm hoping will rejoin again in order to hear these final ideas.

I think you got the message from 1 Thessalonians 1 that's a powerful passage of scripture and there's some really good things in there that will help us to live our lives. But I wanted to share with you some other ideas and you'll be able to see these later on Facebook and get this conclusion to my message today.

On a very practical level I think there's some things I think we can say to people that will be helpful for them and encourage them. And then I think there's some other things that we need to be careful about saying in our understanding of our faith. And they are theologically correct statements. So we need to be careful about that.

I want to suggest that you not say something like, "Everything is going to be okay." The reason you don't want to say that is because even in a normal day not everything is okay with many people. You face challenges, there are things that happen to us, bad things that happen. People will get sick, some people will die. To say everything is going to be okay misses the depth of the

message of the gospel. To just say it's okay misses the deeper truths we want people to understand. So be careful about saying everything's going to be okay.

Also you want to be careful about saying to people, "You're overreacting." It is true that with the news coming out that some people respond to that or they make decisions based on news that is reacting in ways that aren't helpful. But to help someone with anxiety, you don't want to create an accusation. It just doesn't help the person do what they need to do inside. Here's what I think you can say. You can say that we need to prepare for trouble. That doesn't just mean prepare by getting all your food items or your toilet paper or whatever else you need. It means preparing spiritually. Prepare your heart emotionally. Prepare your spirit to handle whatever challenge might come your way. That's what it means to prepare for trouble. Jesus said – *In this world you'll have tribulation, but I have overcome the world.* He was sharing that with His disciples so that they would experience something more even when trials or problems came their way. And that's all the more reason we need to say a couple different things.

I would suggest we want to say to people, "You need to prepare for trouble." That preparation is important. Not just because you want to gather the things you need, the physical things, but you want to prepare your spirit, your heart so that you are ready for whatever takes place. That your stability spiritually will protect you in the midst of the challenges that you face.

And lastly I would say we can say to people, "Don't be afraid." Why? Because you can trust God. You can trust something bigger than yourself, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ.

So each one of us needs to come to a place in our lives where we believe that, we understand that, and we want to share that with other people. Because you don't have to be afraid. God's grace is so big that it helps us deal with any situation that we experience. God's grace is so big He can help us with sickness, He can help us even with death. We don't have to be afraid of those things because of the love of God and who He is and what He wants to do in our lives.

That's the message you want to share with people. I would encourage you to pass that word on so that other people can hear that message as well to bless them and encourage them in their pilgrimage toward the Lord. You're encouraging other Christians in their walk with the Lord. Some people are just coming to get to know Jesus for the first time. You want to encourage them and what that means in some very practical ways. So use that in some ways in your own life and be blessed as you continue to serve the Lord yourself.

God bless you. Have a great week in the Lord.