

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 60** and ask **Question 1: How can you tell if something is the real thing?**

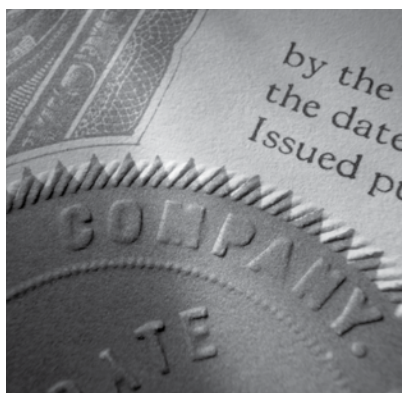
GUIDE: Refer group members to the author's account in "**The Bible Meets Life**" on **PSG page 61** of how William-Henry Ireland claimed to have "found" a previously unknown Shakespearean play. However, he and the play ultimately were revealed to be frauds.

SAY: "Inauthenticity will always be revealed—even when it's in a Christian's attitude."

GUIDE: Introduce **The Point** on **PSG page 61: Authentic joy flows from a relationship with Jesus.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to help us experience the authentic joy that comes from knowing Jesus.

SESSION 5 AUTHENTIC JOY



The Point

Authentic joy flows from a relationship with Jesus.

The Bible Meets Life

Most of us can muster a smile and be polite—even friendly—when we have to. But a genuine joy in the other person's presence calls for something deeper in us. The other

person can tell the difference between a superficial "I'm glad to see you," and authentic joy. We cannot manufacture such genuine joy, but we can possess it when we're consumed with the gospel and love of Christ.

The Passage

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

The Setting

Paul wrote his first letter to the believers at Thessalonica in approximately AD 50, about eighteen years after Jesus' death and resurrection. This makes 1 Thessalonians both one of the earliest of Paul's letters and one of the earliest writings in the New Testament. As such, it provides one of the earliest glimpses of the first-century Christian community, with its emphasis on faith and love.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

- 1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace.
- 2 We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers.
- 3 We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 ▶ Verse 1. Faith and love are the driving forces in how Christians should live their lives. The opening section of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian believers followed a common Hellenistic pattern of three elements: the sender is stated, the recipients are identified, and a brief greeting is given. **Paul** introduced himself, as well as two of his associates: **Silvanus** (also known as Silas) and **Timothy**. That Silvanus and Timothy are included indicates their involvement with and their concern for the Thessalonian church. *Silvanus*, called Silas in Acts, was a trusted leader of the Jerusalem church and a prophet (Acts 15:22). He was one of the believers chosen to deliver the letter written after the Jerusalem council to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (vv. 22,27). Silvanus also accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (15:36–18:22) and was arrested and put in prison, along with Paul, in Philippi (16:16-40). Silvanus and Paul established the church in Thessalonica (17:1-10).

Timothy was of mixed heritage, being the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. Residing in Lystra and held in high esteem by the believers there, Paul recruited Timothy to accompany him early in Paul's second missionary journey. Before they left, however, Paul circumcised Timothy because of his mixed heritage and because of the Jews (16:1-3). He was probably with Paul and Silvanus when the Thessalonian church was founded. Timothy became a close co-worker of Paul's and Paul referred to him as "my true son in the faith" (1 Tim.1:2; see also 1 Cor. 4:17). In addition to the two letters Paul wrote to him, Timothy is mentioned in six of Paul's other letters and was a trusted emissary of Paul's on multiple occasions. ◀

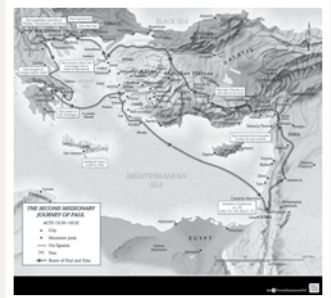
STUDY THE BIBLE 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, refer to "**The Bible Meets Life**" and "**The Setting**" on page 62 to establish the context of the passage.

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 5: The Second Missionary Journey of Paul**. Point out the location of Thessalonica on the map.



READ: Ask a group member to read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 1** to explain who Timothy and Silvanus (Silas) were and how they helped Paul in his ministry.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 62**, to the author's description of the troubled background of the start of the church at Thessalonica. Highlight Paul's joy on hearing that "the new Christians in Thessalonica were continuing to grow in the faith and were persevering despite the continued persecution they were experiencing." Ask a volunteer to read Acts 17:1-10.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 2** to explain the following:

- *The phrase in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the multiple purposes it served Paul to use it here.*
- *The greeting grace to you and peace.*

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Ask the group to consider these two questions regarding your church:

- *What is our church known for in the community?*
- *If our church ceased to exist, would the people in our community notice?*

The letter is addressed to **the church of the Thessalonians**. The word translated *church* was not a specifically Christian term in the first century. It was also used of pagan religious gatherings and secular groups as well. Here it refers to a local gathering of believers in Christ. Unlike how the term *church* is often used today, it does not refer to the structure the believers met in, but to the believers themselves.

Thessalonica was located on the Gulf of Salonika and was the capital of Macedonia. It was one of the most important commercial centers in Greece (Corinth being the other). It had an excellent harbor and was strategically located along a major trade route.

2 ▶ Paul's use of the phrase **in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** served multiple purposes. First, the use of the term *in* signified the intimate relationship between these believers and God the Father and Jesus Christ. Second, the church was *in God the Father*, restricting the church to the God that the Christians and Jews worshiped. *The Father* emphasized both God's authority over and loving concern for the believers. Third, this church was gathered *in ... the Lord Jesus Christ*. The term *Christ* identified God's Messiah. It also separated this group of believers from the Jews. The term *Lord* indicated that Jesus Christ was the Master of the believers in Thessalonica. It is also equivalent to the term "God." Taken all together, the phrase served to distinguish the Thessalonian believers from other religious and secular groups and identified at the core who they were—believers in Christ.¹

Grace to you and peace was a Pauline greeting that combined both the Greek (*grace*) and Jewish (*peace*) greetings. The Greek word for *grace* means "that which causes joy." Grace reminded believers of the undeserved mercy shown to them in God's gracious act of forgiving their sins and accomplishing their salvation through Jesus Christ. The word for *peace* does not necessarily denote the absence of conflict. For believers it communicates the wholeness and the abundant blessings made available to the believer through salvation in Jesus Christ. ◀

Verses 2-3. Following the opening address, as was typical in Paul's writings (Galatians being the only exception), an expression of thanksgiving was offered. Paul was genuinely thankful for the believers in Thessalonica. Their loyalty to him and the gospel overflowed Paul's heart with joy.

The verb tense of the term rendered **thank**, along with the words **always** and **constantly**, indicate that Paul was consistent in his thankfulness and in his prayers for the Thessalonian believers. The Thessalonians were a source of constant joy for Paul.

3 ▶ When Paul and his coworkers prayed for the Thessalonian believers, they remembered three specific things in their prayers. It was not just Paul and his coworkers who remembered these things about the Thessalonians. God, our Father, saw them as well. The reason for their joy in the Thessalonians focused on three activities—their **work**, their **labor**, and their **endurance**.

The first thing Paul mentioned was **your work produced by faith**. While Paul emphasized that salvation is by faith in Christ alone, true faith will produce meaningful works as evidence of the genuineness of one's salvation (Eph. 2:8-10; Gal. 5:16-25). The term translated **work** refers to daily tasks of labor, work done in one's occupation, business, and so forth.

The second was the Thessalonians' **labor motivated by love**. The Greek term for **labor** is a stronger term than the previous one translated "work." Labor refers to intense toil, wearisome work prompted by love. The term for **love** (*agape*) is used by John to describe God's very nature (1 John 4:16), the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross when He laid down His life for us (3:10,16), and the love God has for us as His adopted children (v. 1). This same love resides in the believer and is to be expressed both vertically toward God and horizontally toward other people (4:12,16). It is through these labors of love that the Thessalonians showed themselves (and we show ourselves today) to be God's children and Jesus' disciples.

The third thing was the Thessalonians' **endurance inspired by hope**. The term translated *endurance* was used in connection with athletes and soldiers. It is an active word which describes the athlete's or soldier's strength to both endure the assaults of his enemy and to strike back at the same to gain the victory. This endurance is linked to **hope**, the confident expectation and assurance of victory.

Paul described faith, hope, and love as the three Christian virtues which remain (1 Cor.13:13). These three actions of the Thessalonians and their corresponding virtues were accomplished **in our Lord Jesus Christ**. The Christian lives in and for Christ. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). ◀

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 63** to the three activities referred to in verse 3 powered by faith, love, and hope:

- *Faith produced their work.*
- *Love motivated their labor.*
- *Hope inspired their endurance.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary **3** to provide a more in-depth explanation of the three activities and the power source behind them.

DISCUSS: **Question #2 (PSG, p. 63): When have you been thankful for the faith and love of someone?**

Alternate: How can you tell if someone is motivated by love or obligation?

TRANSITION: "In the next verses, we will see the response of joy to the message of the gospel."

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** on this page and page 67 to provide explanation to the term *chosen*, often translated *election*, and the debate about what that means.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 5** on pages 67-68 to explain the significant ideas in verses 5-6:

- Paul dedicated himself to the preaching and spread of the gospel.
- The power of God revealed through the Holy Spirit.
- Full assurance provided by the Holy Spirit.
- Authentic lives lived in community with others.
- Imitators of Paul and Christ.
- Severe persecution.
- Response of authentic joy from the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6

4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you,

5 because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. You know how we lived among you for your benefit,

6 and you yourselves became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit.

Verse 4. Joy flows from our salvation experience. At this point, Paul moved his focus from what the Thessalonians were doing to what God had done. He identified the Thessalonians as **brothers and sisters loved by God**. Paul identified with the Thessalonian believers by calling them his *brothers and sisters*. The reason for the familial connection was that Paul and the Thessalonians were part of God's family, those who are loved by God. God demonstrated this love by sending Jesus to suffer and die that they might be brought into God's family through repentance and faith in Christ. The term translated *loved* does not refer to a single, specific instance of love, but rather to an established relationship of love.

Paul stated, **For we know ... that he has chosen you.** Paul knew God had chosen the Thessalonians. The Greek term translated *for we know* "implies knowledge gained by past experience."² Paul had witnessed their genuine faith, their changed lives, and their fervent ministry, and he knew that they were part of God's family. Their life and witness affirmed their position. (Paul developed this more fully in vv. 5-10 which are discussed below.)

4 ▶ The Greek term for *chosen* is also often translated as *election*. In the Christian context, the broadest sense of the word is that God in some way selects out of all humanity those who become a part of His family through faith in Christ. Throughout the history of the Christian church, there has been a lively and often heated debate

about the specific details as to how the process of election works, particularly concerning the relationship between election and human free will. Unfortunately, there has been no resolution of the debate over the meaning of the term “election” that has been satisfactory to all those concerned. Interestingly, Paul did not attempt to explain the concept here. ◀

5 ▶ Verse 5. Paul’s assurance of the Thessalonians’ salvation was based on the gospel. **Our gospel** does not mean Paul manufactured it; rather, it was his in the sense that he had committed his life to it and had dedicated himself to the preaching and spread of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of salvation that God has made available for sinful humanity through Christ’s death on the cross. Elsewhere Paul identifies the gospel as “the gospel of God” (1 Thess. 2:8,9) and “the gospel of Christ” (3:2).

Paul brought the gospel to the Thessalonians not only in **word**; it came with the transforming **power** of God. The Greek term for *power* is one of the terms used to describe Jesus’ miracles. When the gospel is preached, God’s power is unleashed through the work of the **Holy Spirit** for the salvation of people, rescuing them from darkness and transferring them into the kingdom of God. The changed lives of those who respond to the gospel, by repenting and putting their faith in Christ, testify to the truth of the gospel. The greatest miracle of all is the miracle of a changed life in Christ. In fact, the Thessalonian believers’ changed lives due to the Holy Spirit’s work gave them **full assurance** concerning their new life in Christ and their hope of eternal life in heaven to come (Rom. 8:16-17).

After emphasizing the powerful working of God in bringing the gospel to the Thessalonians through the apostle Paul and his companions, Paul reminded the Thessalonians, **You know how we lived among you for your benefit.** In addition to the demonstration of the power of God, the Thessalonians had the opportunity to see the examples of Paul and his companions in regards to how to live the Christian life.

Verse 6. Having both the gospel of Christ and the examples of Paul and his fellow evangelists, the Thessalonians became **imitators** of both Paul and Christ. Ultimately, the Thessalonians were followers of Christ, in whom they had placed their faith. However, they were also followers of Paul’s example as he followed Christ’s example (1 Cor. 11:1). In so doing, the Thessalonians were living lives pleasing to **the Lord** as disciples of Christ.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 65** to the author’s discussion of authentic joy that arises out of salvation. It has these three characteristics:

- *Authentic joy does not wax and wane with circumstances.*
- *Authentic joy is more solid and stable than the rising sun.*
- *Authentic joy is not found in immediate gratification but by pushing past it.*

GUIDE: Refer group members to the quote by C. S. Lewis on **PSG page 65:**

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

DISCUSS: Question #3 (PSG, p. 64): How has the gospel produced joy in your life?

Alternate: When have you seen the power of the gospel displayed in someone’s life?

TRANSITION: “In the next verses, we will see the powerful influence of being an example for others.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to the **KEY WORDS** for information about *Macedonia and Achaia*.

LEADER PACK: Use **Item 5: The Second Missionary Journey of Paul** to point out the location of Macedonia and Achaia on the map.



The Thessalonians had welcomed the gospel **in spite of severe persecution**. They suffered persecution from their fellow countrymen who opposed the spread of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:14). Coming to Christ also could have caused divisions among family members and alienation from friends. In spite of the persecution, the Thessalonians had **welcomed the message with joy**. This joy proceeded from **the Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit's presence and working in the lives of the Thessalonian believers “was both evidence of the fact of salvation and the assurance of the ultimate deliverance yet to come. Although conversion meant temporary affliction, it also promised eternal rejoicing.”³ ◀

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

7 As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

8 For the word of the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out. Therefore, we don't need to say anything,

9 for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God

10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

KEY WORDS: Macedonia and Achaia (v. 7)—When the Romans gained control of Greece, they divided it into two provinces. Macedonia was the northern and Achaia was the southern province. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia.

6 ▶ Verses 7-8. Love and joy provide a compelling witness and example for others to follow. The Greek term translated **example** means an image or pattern. The

Thessalonians believers' lives were a model to all the believers in **Macedonia** and **Achaia**. Macedonia was the Roman province in the northern part of Greece, while Achaia was directly below it in the southern part of Greece. In Macedonia were the churches in Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea, while in Achaia were Athens and Corinth. The Thessalonian believers were the only group that Paul singled out in his letters as examples of how to live out the Christian life. ◀

7 ▶ In addition to being an example, the Thessalonians' reputation served as means by which the gospel was spread. **The word of the Lord** is a common Old Testament expression. It means that the word proclaimed was not man-made, but was from God. **Rang out** was used to describe a trumpet blast or the roll of thunder. The word "echo" is derived from the Greek term. The tense of this Greek verb indicates that the proclamation of the gospel message was not a one time event, but was continuous. Through the Thessalonians' reputation as faithful believers, the gospel spread not only throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but everywhere Christians went with the gospel. The spread of both the news of Thessalonian believers' faith and the gospel message would have been helped by the city itself. Thessalonica possessed an excellent harbor and sat on a major road. Because word of their faith had spread far and wide, Paul wrote that he didn't need to say anything about it. Word about the Thessalonian believers was spreading on its own.

Verse 9. Wherever Paul went, he heard word of what had taken place during his time among the Thessalonian believers. The power of the gospel results in changed lives, and this is certainly true of what happened among the Thessalonians. They had **turned**. The term indicates a distinct and deliberate about-face, a radical change. It involves a change of mind and a change of behavior. The Thessalonians had turned **to God from idols**. Several pagan deities were worshiped in Thessalonica: the Egyptian gods Serapis and Isis, and the Greek gods Zeus, Demeter, Aphrodite, Asclepius, and Dionysus. Idols are dead and powerless. They represent false gods and cannot lead to truth. In contrast to these idols, Jesus is **the living and true God**. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). The Thessalonians had turned to God in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

No longer enslaved to idols, these believers now served God. In contrast to believers who serve the one, true God,

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 6** on page 68 and this page to share these bits of information about being an example:

- *Love and joy provide a compelling witness and example for others to follow.*
- *The Greek term translated example means an image or pattern.*
- *The Thessalonians believers' lives were a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*
- *The Thessalonian believers were the only group that Paul singled out in his letters as examples of how to live out the Christian life.*

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 7** on this page and page 70 to list ways Paul described how Thessalonian believers had influenced others by their example:

- *The word of the Lord rang out from you.*
- *You became an example ... in every place that your faith in God has gone out.*
- *You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 67-68** to what believers must remember and guard against:

- *Remember what you deserve.*
One of the great enemies of joy is entitlement.
- *Remember what you have.*
Another enemy of joy is comparison.
- *Remember what was paid.*

DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 66): How can we live out our faith so that it is evident to others?

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 68): What can we learn from 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 about becoming a more welcoming group?

Alternate: How does living joyful lives attract others to the gospel?

DO: Invite group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity titled “**Joy**” on **PSG page 68**, and encourage volunteers to share responses.

every lost person serves someone or something else, be it false gods or their own passions and desires—all of which ultimately can be labeled sin (Rom. 6:16). But God alone deserves our worship and service. Paul repeatedly described himself as a slave (or servant) of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1). It’s the way real believers live—as servants of Jesus. ◀

Verse 10. While serving God, the Thessalonians were **to wait** for Jesus’ return at His second coming. While we wait, we are to be expectant of Jesus’ return (Matt. 24:36-44; 25:1-13), but at the same time patient (2 Pet. 3:8) and faithful to those tasks and roles we have been given by God (Matt. 25:14-30). We are not to grow weary, become careless, or become indulgent in the pleasures of this world (24:45-51).

For his Son from heaven also refers to the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 19). His coming will bring the world as we know it to a close. **Whom he raised from the dead** recalls Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 3:15; 13:30,37). Jesus has conquered death, both for Himself and for those who place their faith in Him (1 Cor. 15:12-22; 1 Thess. 4:13-14).

Jesus not only has power over the grave, death, and hell (Rev. 20:11-15), He also **rescues us from the coming wrath**—the final judgment. The word **wrath** speaks of God’s abiding, absolute judgment against evil. The wrath of God is often an unpopular subject today, one that is either avoided or ignored even in many churches. But God’s wrath against all evil shows that He takes sin very seriously, so seriously that He sent His Son into the world to ultimately pay the price for humanity’s sins. The only deliverance (rescue) from God’s wrath is through Jesus Christ, who took upon Himself both our sins and the just penalty of God’s wrath for those sins at the cross (Col. 2:13-14).

The Thessalonians were models in how they lived out their faith in Jesus Christ. May we all strive to attain such devotion and passion for God as we live out our lives in and through Christ today!

1. D. Michael Martin, 1, 2 *Thessalonians*, vol. 33 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 50–51.
2. *Ibid.*, 57–58.
3. *Ibid.*, 62.

LIVE IT OUT

We can manufacture happiness and a plastic smile easily enough. But time and circumstances will reveal the phoniness behind it. Authentic joy, on the other hand, will shine through, for it is rooted not in our present circumstances, but in what God has done for us in Christ.

- ▶ **Thank someone.** Who is one person in your life who lives with authentic joy? Write a note to say thanks for the example he or she has shown to you.
- ▶ **Grow in joy.** Take a hard look at the suggestions for growing your joy on pages 63-64. Write them out on index cards and place them in spots where you will see them on a daily basis.
- ▶ **Journal your thanks.** Because joy is linked with gratitude, begin a “thankful” journal. Each day for the next month write down something specific you are thankful for and watch your joy begin to grow.

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** **Authentic joy flows from a relationship with Jesus.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 69)**; (see text to the left). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Remind group members that joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), something God produces in us. Encourage them to live lives of authentic joy so that others recognize this distinctive quality in our lives.

PRAY: “Father, help us to live in such a way that we are an example to others of the joy of knowing Jesus.”



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