



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Pack the Place

What every church should be filled with

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Part 1

Tim Badal | January 10, 2016 | 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10



We're in the second week of a series entitled "Ready," in the books of First and Second Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul wrote these books in the first century to a church in the city of Thessalonica in modern day Greece (thus, it's called Thessalonians). These letters were written to help this young, fledgling church know what it means to live an upright and godly life amidst all the trials, tribulations and troubles that they may face in the world.

Our goal in this series is to go through these letters verse by verse to find out what the Apostle Paul is trying to tell us and how we can apply these lessons to our own lives here in the year 2016 in the Fox Valley Area at Village Bible Church.

As we open to 1 Thessalonians 1, we find a church that set an example to be followed. Paul says, "You have become an example to so many people" (1 Thessalonians 1:7). We want to learn from their example. We want to imitate what they were doing. They weren't doing it all perfectly, but we want to learn what made their church a place of life change in the community and world around them.

As I look at verse seven, I wonder what made them great and what might have kept them from being great? Paul wrote about two things that they were doing well at the time but also about things that could have hindered or handicapped their ability to continue moving forward. The first thing he addressed was struggles. There were all kinds of afflictions, trials and tribulations that were going on in their lives. Struggles can thwart a church's ability to do what God has called it to do. No doubt we as a church will face struggles: between people in our church, with unity, financial, or struggles with the world we're trying to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any of these struggles can keep a church from doing all that it's supposed to do.

The second thing is something we don't always see as a hindrance: this church was very successful. When we have struggles it's easy to want to fix those things, but what about when a church is successful? What about when everything is going right for a church? The Thessalonians could have just sat back and relished the fact that they were a successful church. Their fame and renown was known, not only in their community but also in the world. Many of us here are going through struggles now. That's just a way of life. We know we're going to have struggles in this world. But as a church that has grown and has some really awesome years behind it, Village Bible Church could just rest in the successes of yesteryear. We could just sit back and say, "Look at all these great things we've done." Even as we embark on a new year, we could look back at 2015 and say, "What a great year. Great ministry took place! What an awesome time to be part of Village Bible Church." But Paul says that a church that lives in yesterday's successes is doing nothing for the Kingdom of God in the present.

So with that in mind we're going to look at the first ten verses and ask this question: how do we become a church that changes lives? What a great question to ask in the second week of a new year! We're going to ask that the Lord would really teach us and that we would apply these things to our own lives so that as a church we can make 2016 so much greater than 2015 was, for the glory of God.

First Thessalonians 1:1–10:

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.

²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For 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. ⁹For 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, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Last week was a pretty important week in the community of Hinckley where I live. Hinckley is the home of the Harlem Globetrotters. If you follow the Harlem Globetrotters on their Twitter account it said, "We're heading home! We're heading to Hinckley." Some of you are thinking, "Harlem... Hinckley... Those two places couldn't be farther apart on the spectrum." But in January of 1927, the Harlem Globetrotters played their first basketball game in a little high school gymnasium out in rural Hinckley, Illinois. In my lifetime I know of three occasions that The Globetrotters have come back to commemorate their anniversary. They came in 1987, 2001 and now in 2016.

The Globetrotters had three games in the Chicagoland area: All State Arena, The United Center and the hottest ticket in town, Hinckley-Big Rock High School. Everyone wanted to know who had tickets and if they would sell them. The high school gym seats anywhere from 1,100 to 1,300 people. One section at either of those other arenas is as big as Hinckley-Big Rock High School. When we got there it was like packing in sardines. I looked around and was amazed. I played basketball there and I never remember that many people coming to watch our pathetic team. It was packed! They had seats all around the baseline. Every inch of that gym had people in it.

It was an incredible night! It was amazing to watch a full-scale Globetrotter game with all of their antics. As I was sitting there watching, the place was rocking. It was full and there was excitement because we were part of something that was truly great. It was something that many people would never be able to experience. There aren't many places as small as Hinckley that can say that The Globetrotters came and played in their high school gym.

Some of you may say, "That's a pretty small thing. There are greater things in the world." We live in Hinckley! There's not a lot going on in Hinckley. We'll take whatever we can get. I remember sitting in the stands and thinking, what if the church had this kind of buzz about it? What if the church got this excited about God's work in our communities and in the world around us? What if we, with such expectation and excitement, would say on a Sunday morning, "The hottest ticket in town is to be at Village Bible Church because I know something historic is going to take place"?

In our passage today, the Apostle Paul says that something similar to what I experienced in Hinckley-Big Rock's gym was going on in the Thessalonian church. Lives were changed and people were excited about what God was doing. He was using this little, fledgling church to change lives. As a result, Paul sat down and wrote this letter to this church that he had helped start. He had preached for three Sabbath days in the synagogue but had to leave Thessalonica because a mob came. These people hated Christianity so they threw him out of the city and he was not allowed to come back. He wrote them this letter approximately a year later and said, "How I long to see you!" He was in southern Greece near Athens, and Thessalonica was in northern Greece. He says, "Even from this distance I hear all that's going on there and I'm very proud of you! What you're doing is changing lives."

So how do we model that? How do we as a church begin to bottle that kind of success? We could come up with all kinds of ideas and programs for success, but you will notice there's not a single program in our text. There aren't five steps to achieving success. It doesn't say, "Make your service exciting and fun. Make sure you have all kinds of pyrotechnics so people like it. Make sure you have a great rock band behind you so that people are rocking and enjoying it. Just have fun!" It doesn't say any of that. It says that when we have our lives focused in and founded on the Person and work of Jesus Christ, when we are transformed and allow that to renew our hearts and minds, God says He will take a group of people who are so excited about the salvation that they've experienced and He'll change the world.

There are four characteristics of what we as people need to have in our lives and then in turn what the church can do.

1. Established

Paul says, “You guys are a wonderful church. You’re doing great things.” He says a church that is healthy and on the move for Christ is one that is filled with people who are established.

Only thirteen years ago I became a first-time father and started this journey of parenting with Amanda. As parents we recognized in the early years that our number one priority was to create an environment where our children would be founded and established on wise principles. They’ve become more complex as the years have progressed. You start with “Don’t touch.” “Don’t touch that! You’ll get hurt.” Then it’s, “Don’t go there!” If you’re playing outside it’s, “Stay out of the street! Don’t go there!” Then you start having conversations about things like how to make friends and then peer pressure. As parents we start out very small in establishing our children, knowing that if we build a right foundation, when they grow older they’ll be able to make wise and godly decisions.

Paul begins the passage by reminding this young church who they were and where they had come from so that as they grew older they would make healthy and wise decisions. Verse one says, “*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace.*” He starts by saying, “Here’s who you are.” He wasn’t writing this letter to Tim. He wasn’t writing this letter to Pastor Keith, or Pastor Steve, or anyone in particular. He says “*to the church.*”

In that day they would have gathered on the Lord’s Day and someone would get up and say, “We’ve received a letter from the Apostle Paul. We’re going to read and meditate on it. We’ll try to understand what he’s saying and make changes in the areas he points out because he’s an apostle. He is the authority in our lives. We’re going to do what this letter says.” So the people would listen.

Paul begins by saying, “The reason you are this church is because of Jesus Christ.” What a great reminder that was to the Thessalonian church. You and I don’t gather together because we’re the same people. We’re different weights, we’re different heights, we make different amounts of money, we enjoy different hobbies, we’re different nationalities, we have different cultural backgrounds, and we enjoy different sporting teams. There’s a myriad of things that demonstrate that we are different. So how does a group of different people come together and become one entity in this thing called the church?

The word “church” in the Greek language that Paul wrote in is the word *ekklesia*, which literally means the assembly of called out ones. What were we called out to? Verse one says “to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...” As we enter into this place and assemble as a church, though we are different in so many ways, we gather under one banner: the banner of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. That means everything we do—the reason for being here, the reason for the songs we sing, the messages we hear, the fellowship we enjoy—is based on our connection with Christ Jesus our Lord, not on our differences.

Why should He get all the praise? Today we’ll have more than 600 people who will show up at this building, almost 1,000 people across our four campuses, not to mention all the other churches that are gathering this morning. Why would all these different people gather and give praise and adoration to Jesus? What other time do you get together during the week to sing songs to a Person you’ve never seen with your eyes? Why in the world would we do that? The answer is our Lord Jesus Christ. What has He done? The end of verse one says He has given us grace and peace. The reason we gather, the reason we’re the church, the reason the church exists is that we are giving worship and praise to the One Who gives us grace—God’s unmerited favor to us.

We know we need God’s favor because the Scriptures tell us that in our sinful state we are enemies of God and we are at war with Him. God, in His great and supreme love for us, sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins so that we might be extended grace and mercy in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16), which allows peace to come into our lives. So we are a group of people who have experienced a singular grace and peace. Even though we’re different we can gather together as the church because we are worshipping the same God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul says one of the reasons we are established is because of the love of God. Verse four says, “*For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you.*” What an incredible statement! I recognize that there are deep theological disagreements over what Paul is articulating. While we all agree that God loves us, that word “chosen” and the theological terms of election and predestination can cause people to get worked up. When we see the phrases “loved by God” and “chosen by God,” three things can come as a result:

- a. Our salvation begins with God. Second Thessalonians 2:13 says, “*God chose you as the first fruits to be saved.*” God does the choosing. Ephesians 1:4 says this choosing takes place before the foundation of the world. Before you and I were ever born, before Adam and Eve stepped into the Garden of Eden, God had in His mind and heart that He would extend His love to humanity even though they would fall into sin. He loves.

- b. This love is shown to all. God loves all of humanity even though all of humanity, because of sin, is heading to hell. If God doesn't intervene then we're all heading to hell. Without Jesus Christ we would be lost and dead in our sin and we'd be on our way to hell. But God, because of His rich mercy and great love for us, allows us to become children of God. The Apostle John says, "*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God*" (1 John 3:1).

Maybe you feel very unloved. Maybe you feel how I felt in junior high: unwanted. When I was in junior high, the worst moment in my day was when we would go out for recess and line up against the brick wall. Then the two cool kids—who somehow had that title since the first day of kindergarten—had the privilege of picking who was going to be on their team. I was a little heavier set than I would have liked to be; I was a little more awkward than most kids. I remember standing there and person after person was picked. And I thought, "Nobody wants me. Nobody wants me." I could go further and tell you about the junior high dances, but I won't go there.

Here's what God is saying. God is announcing, "I want you on My team." If that doesn't bring you a great sense of solace in your heart, then you're missing out on a great truth. God is announcing through the gospel, "I want you with Me. I pick you. I choose you. I know you're messed up. I know you've got struggles. I know you're maybe not as coordinated as the other kids. I know you think you're insignificant." But God is announcing to the world and to you today, "I want you. Come be with Me!"

How does this happen? You say, "I don't ever remember a time when we all lined up and God came down and started picking people." The answer is that the gospel is the mechanism by which that takes place. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). We're standing against the wall and God says, "You can all be superstars today. You can all be on My team. The reason is because of this Guy here: Jesus Christ. My one and only Son died on the cross for you so that you might experience grace and peace, and so that you might be part of My team."

If you have never bowed the knee to Jesus, if you've never accepted that message, then you're not established. You may have a lot of money in your bank account, everything may be going great for you, but the singularly most important question in life that has to be answered is, "Where do I stand with Jesus? Have I accepted His invitation to have Him in my life so that He can change me, forgive me of my sins, and cleanse me of my unrighteousness so that I can walk in unity and fellowship with Him?"

Paul says, "You Thessalonians have got it. You guys have figured it out. God has revealed to you His grace and mercy that allows peace and contentment in this world." We need to be an established people. It begins with God. He's the One Who affirms it. How do we become established? It begins by accepting the message. Verses five and six say:

Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Yesterday I was watching a TV preacher. It was Saturday night and there was nothing on TV so I decided to watch a TV preacher. This very polished preacher was in front of thousands of people in a multi-million-dollar facility and said, "If you come to Jesus today, you'll be healthy. If you come to Jesus, there will be riches ready for you. If you come to Jesus, you'll never be unhappy again." I don't know what he's reading, but he isn't reading the Bible. Here's what we know: the Thessalonians accepted Jesus as their Savior and the Scripture says they did so "*in much affliction*." That doesn't sound very healthy, wealthy or happy. But here's what it says: while they accepted Christ and received the gospel with much affliction, they did so "*with the joy of the Holy Spirit*." When we accept Christ He doesn't take away our problematic situations. He enters into those trials and tribulations, walking with us through them. So we can have joy and peace because we've experienced God's grace.

- c. We have to turn from worldly things. Verse nine says, "*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*." If we're going to accept Christ's invitation to be on His team and be in His family, then we have to say goodbye to the things that we have loved that are against the will and plans of God. We have to turn away from our sins. We can't have any other gods before us—manmade gods, handmade gods, whatever they may be, and as noble as they may be, nothing else can take first place anymore. Everything has to fall in line under Christ. Paul says, "You're doing this well, Thessalonians. You are established. You know who you are in Christ. Keep up the good work."

2. Exceptional

In what ways were these people exceptional? We know this church was filled with everyday, ordinary working people. Nowhere in the letter does anyone get any special recognition. Nowhere in this church were there people vying to be under the teaching of one pastor or another, as in the church of Corinth. In Corinth there were three different guys who were getting a lot of press. The Thessalonians didn't have any of that. What we understand from church history is that the Thessalonian church was a blue collar, working class church. So what made them exceptional?

Paul says in verse three that they were continually engaged in the service of Christ through their "... *work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*" One commentator says that Paul articulates in this short verse a brief definition of all true Christianity. Another commentator writes this: "It is the whole Christianity. If you get your faith, hope and love down then you've got Christianity down."

Each of these things comes from God. You and I can't have faith, real love or real hope apart from God. God says He gives these things to His people. He gives us the ability to have faith. He gives us the ability to show *agape* (God like) love to others. He gives us hope for tomorrow. It's not a wishy-washy hope. It's not the kind of hope that says, "I hope that my favorite football team wins in the playoffs." It's a sense that it is going to happen because God has promised it. It comes from God.

These gifts from God aren't real unless they're put into action. Think about this: faith is dead unless you exhibit it. What if I say, "I love my family," over and over again but do nothing to show them my love? When they need me I say, "I'm too busy." When they need words of affirmation I say, "I'm mute to that point. I can't share." The only way we really know someone loves us is not by the words they say but by the actions and deeds that are exhibited. What is hope unless we put that hope to the test? We put hope into things knowing that God will see us through. Each of these gifts that made this church exceptional are things that they recognized came from God so they didn't get big heads. They didn't say, "Look at my faith! Look at my love! Look at my hope!" No, they were gifts from God.

Second, they were things that they had to put into action. They couldn't just sit around in their small groups and say, "I think these things but I don't have to do them." They were doing them.

Thirdly, these gifts allowed them to have a stronger relationship with God and others. We will never have a strong relationship with God unless the faith, love and hope that we have are drawing us closer to Him. Likewise, that same faith, hope and love that we extend to God from gratitude for what He has given us has to be shown to the world around us or we won't have any relationships. This church had recognized that they needed to do it and with great strength. Notice the phrase "*labor of love.*" He's literally talking about when a woman is in labor—the strenuous activity of giving birth to a child. The phraseology he used let them know that this wasn't going to come easy or simply. They were laboring and straining to show their faith, love and hope. But God says, "If I give it to you then it's at your disposal." Without faith, love and hope in our lives or in this church we've got nothing. We have to exhibit these things.

3. Enthusiastic

These people were established—they knew who they were. They were exceptional—they were doing the right things. They were also enthusiastic. These people had their lives changed for the better and they were eager to make everyone else aware of it. Isn't that how we are as people?

When I started this message I told you about The Globetrotters. I didn't say, "What a waste of time! It was terrible." No, I gave you the impression that the next time the Harlem Globetrotters are around you should go see them. It's pretty exceptional. At the end of the day one of my sons said, "This is one of the greatest days of my life, Dad!" I said, "Well, that's pretty cool. Just wait until you get older though because... No, you're right. This is probably the greatest day of your life."

When we say stuff like that we spur others on to go and see it and be a part of it. If we really like a movie we saw we'll sit around with friends or coworkers and say, "You've got to go see this!" Or when you've eaten at a great restaurant and someone asks you, "What'd you do this weekend?" You'd say, "I went to the greatest restaurant in the world! It was so good. You have to go and be a part of it!" These people weren't talking about a movie or a sporting event; they were talking about their relationship with Jesus Christ. They had tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). Because God had so drastically changed them they were enthusiastic to make sure that everybody else knew what was going on.

Verse eight says that the testimony of their faith, hope and love had sounded forth. This is probably the most important part of my message so pay attention. When it says sounded forth the Greek word is a massive word that I'm not even going to try and pronounce, but its transliteration into the English language would start with the word echo. It's saying that their faith, their hope and their love had echoed and reverberated. That word literally gives the word picture of a bell. He's saying that this bell or echo is what you are to be doing and how you are to be living as a follower of Christ in this world.

Picture a bell. I looked up how many parts there are in a bell and there are about 25. I only see three. I don't know who's right: the bell experts or Tim Badal. You have a handle, the bell body and the clapper. I found out that you must have the bell body and the clapper to make the sound. If you have no clapper in the bell you can shake that bell and it won't make a sound. It's just a hunk of metal. But with that little clapper hanging inside the bell's body, you have the ability to make a sound. Paul is saying that when their faith, love, hope and enthusiasm over the life change they had experienced in Jesus Christ come into contact with their God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit, it will make a sound. Our job is to make sure that our faith, hope and love are continually in contact with our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. When we do that a sound resonates.

Here's the amazing thing about a bell: when you ring it, the sound can be heard from far away. When we exhibit faith, hope and love, and we do so with God, it will make a noise. That noise is going to sound forth. I have a pretty small bell here, yet 400 people have now heard it. A little bell resonates in the hearts of people when rung for the glory of God. A couple of things happen when you ring a bell. You did not feel what I felt when I rang the bell. You just heard the sound. I felt the pressure of the clapper hitting the body of the bell. When you as a Christian are brought into the work of Jesus Christ in your life, you will feel it. But everyone else will only hear a sound. Paul says to the Thessalonians, *"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."* This little church was ringing its bell so loudly that everybody could hear it.

That begs the fundamental question for each of us who call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ: are you ringing your bell? Can anyone hear it? We can walk around with our bell and make sure that the clapper doesn't do anything. I can shake it but you won't hear anything. I can pretend to be shaking the bell while nobody hears a thing. So the question is when you're at school, or at work, or in your neighborhood, are you shaking the bell in a way that nobody can hear it? Or are you shaking it so that everyone around you can hear it? The Thessalonians sounded forth in their faith and it changed lives.

Here's the amazing thing: the Bible says that as the Spirit of God moves in the hearts and minds of people, when they hear that sound they will know it's something different and they'll be attracted to it. When the Spirit of God moves in the hearts of people, like He did in the hearts of the Thessalonians and in our hearts, at some point we hear that bell and we say, "That bell sounds different than anything I've ever heard before." But sadly so many of us have quieted the bell in our lives, and our faith is not sounding forth.

4. Expectant

They were established, they were exceptional, they were energetic and wanted to their message to get out, and they were expectant. The closing verse gives us the reason for our strength for today and our hope for tomorrow. After they had turned from their idols and were serving God, verse ten says they were *"...to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."*

Right there in black and white the Apostle Paul says that this Jesus Who walked on the earth 17-18 years prior to this letter being written, Whom he had met on the rode to Damascus as he was going to thwart and destroy Christianity, this Jesus Who went to the cross, was buried in a grave and then rose from the dead. This Jesus whom the disciples said ascended to heaven promised to come back. In fact, the second to the last verse of the Bible says, *"Surely I am coming soon"* (Revelation 22:20). Paul says that we as people in the here and now must recognize that Jesus is coming back. But how do we live with that anticipation? What an incredible promise! An old hymn said it this way: "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be! When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory!" (When We All Get to Heaven, Eliza E. Hewit). Jesus is coming. He's going to take us to be with Him.

We're going to meet Jesus in one of two ways. We're going to die and be present with the Lord as the Apostle Paul says, or Jesus will meet us here on earth and we will be caught up with Him in the air. Those are the two ways that we will meet Jesus. In that

moment we are going to praise Him and announce it to all around. What a day of rejoicing that will be! But what about here and now while we're in this world of much affliction and trouble? What do we do? What about the Thessalonians? They had troubles and trials. How did this hope allow them to live their lives any differently?

I'm going to close with a final illustration, and I don't mean to make any jokes about it. Hopefully this will help you live differently as a follower of Christ this week. Imagine with me that we're about to close this service and God shows up right here behind this pulpit. God, with His myriad of angels, announces to us, "I have a promise for you and the One Who gives this promise is faithful and true. Write this down and make sure you never forget it: in 2016 the Cubs are going to win the World Series." That's what He says. We all sit there and think, "Wow, that's great!" There's a sense of excitement.

But then the season starts and the Cubs lose their first ten games. They look terrible on the field. Then they pull it together a little bit and we're in the dog days of summer in July and August, and they're in third or fourth place. All of our expectations of them being a great team have fallen apart. They've had injuries; there's disunity in the clubhouse; there are questions on whether their manager has it figured out and whether the young kids can truly play. You have a lot of questions. You've told people, "I love the Cubs! They're going to win the World Series. I have a hope in it. I'm certain of it!" You go to work and they say, "What a loser! Why would you support this team? This team is letting your heart down! It's not living up to your expectations." You have a choice to either believe the promises of God or let your faith in your heart be reduced to saying, "Maybe He isn't telling the truth."

If God told us that the Cubs were going to win the World Series, then we would believe it. We'd be okay if they lost their first ten games and we'd say, "It's a long season." If everything were falling apart we'd say, "They're going to pull it together. The One Who told me they're going to win is utterly faithful to see it come to fruition. I'm going to believe it even though at times the world is telling me I'm a fool for doing so."

This is our struggle with believing that Jesus is coming back. People mock it and say it's never going to happen. People say you're putting your hope and trust in a team that's never going to win. The One Who articulates this is faithful and true. Jesus tells us in His own words. The prophets told us in their words. The apostles told us in their words. All of the Scriptures tell us this truth: Jesus is coming back. We don't know if it's today, or tomorrow, or one hundred years from now. But what we do know is that we can have confidence because the One Who has told us this is true.

Right before verse ten it says, *"...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."* This God, Who knows we are called to wait for His Son from heaven, has given us a promise. How will we live in light of it? How does that add up for us as individuals? Will we live with that truth in our mind or will we will allow the people of this world to say, "You don't know what you're talking about. What a fool for believing these things!" The Thessalonian church knew in Whom they believed. They were established. They knew Who loved them. They were a church that was not only established but exceptional. They were busy striving to serve God. They were energetic. They were so changed by what God had done in their lives that they wanted everyone to know about it in such a way that they were literally ringing their bells so that all could hear. They were an expectant group that believed in Christ's words when He said, *"Surely I am coming soon."*

We cannot be this kind of church without being this kind of people. My hope and prayer is that as we have heard from God's Word that we would take it to heart and apply these truths, asking, "Am I established, exceptional, energetic and expectant?" I believe our best years are ahead of us as a church because I believe the heart of this church desires for these things to be true. But we need to ask for God's strength, for the Spirit's outpouring of His gifts and blessing in our lives, and we need to be willing to turn away from idols. Then and only then will we be a church ready to make a name for God. That's the best place for a church to be.