



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

A New Letter for the New Year

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Introduction
Tim Badal | January 3, 2016 | 1 Thessalonians 1:1



We're beginning a new series entitled "Ready" which will be focused on First and Second Thessalonians, the earliest letters written by Paul. I want to help you feel a little better by letting you know that by the time we're done with this series in the month of May you will be wearing shorts. Be encouraged by that. It has not been a hard winter at all, quite frankly. We're going to be in these books for the rest of this winter and into spring, finishing up around Mother's Day.

Over the next four months we're going to focus on these two books of the Bible where we will learn what it means to be ready. Many of us weren't ready for church this morning. We got up a little late, the kids didn't cooperate as we wanted them to, and we didn't feel ready when we got to church. Maybe you'll feel that way tomorrow when you're rushing to get back to work and rushing to get the kids back to school. But the Bible tells us that we are to be ready at all times.

First and Second Thessalonians will remind us that there is much for us to be ready for: trials and tribulations that may come, opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and to live lives of holiness. We will learn in this series that when we're ready for whatever the Lord is going to send our way—as the great hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness" reminds us—we will have "strength for today and hope for tomorrow." We'll have everything we need when we position ourselves to be ready. The first Sunday of the year is a great time to start a series on readiness.

As we begin this study we want to build a strong foundation by introducing the text, but here's the problem: introduction sermons are one of the hardest sermons to preach as a pastor. I have two spectrums I can present: either preach the entire series in one sermon and be done, or preach nothing and you're left wondering, "What in the world are we going to be talking about?" I'm praying, and I hope you'll pray with me, that we'll strike a balance that will be a blessing in preparing us for what is going to happen in this series.

I'll also encourage you to take some time in the coming weeks to read the books of First and Second Thessalonians in one sitting. It should only take you 20–25 minutes to read through these books. Read them as though you're in the original audience hearing them for the first time and apply them. Also, I encourage you to be part of our small groups where we get together in groups all throughout the Fox Valley area to study the text prior to the Sunday sermon and involve ourselves in fellowship.

Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 1:1: *"Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you."*

This will seem more like a history lesson than a sermon, but I believe it is so vastly important that we invest some time getting to know and understand why in the world Paul would write these two letters to this group of people in the moment and time that he did. We're going to bounce back and forth between 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and Acts 15.

As we approach First and Second Thessalonians we hear the heart of a pastor who loved his people, who loved how they were serving and who loved to brag to others about what they were doing. Many times you will hear me say—and I hope you hear it more and more—that not only do I love my children but I am proud of what my boys are doing. They're not perfect boys by any stretch of the imagination—you know that as much as I do—but they are good boys and I want to encourage them and

encourage others by telling them how proud I am of them, whether on the athletic field, or in the halls of academia or regarding character. I am proud as their father to tell others of what they are doing and how they are serving their Lord even in small ways.

This is what the Apostle Paul was doing to the church of Thessalonica. He was gushing over the love he had for this young church and how he saw them as a blessing not only to himself but also to all those who came in contact with them. As we approach this we have to look at this letter and understand the following:

1. Reacquainting Ourselves with the Person Writing the Letter

At the beginning of verse one, we are told a singular name: Paul. For those of you who have been around the church for a long time, you know the accolades of this man Paul. But to help you get an understanding of who he was and what he was all about, let me set the table for you on what happened. Paul wrote these two letters 18 years after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Eighteen years ago on December 27, Amanda and I were married right here in this church. We were standing here in this building, giving vows to one another and being married. Many of you don't remember what you were doing in 1997, but I remember very vividly what was taking place at that time. That was a significant moment in my life.

For Jesus' disciples, 18 years had passed since some major things had taken place. They had met Jesus, Who had called them to follow Him, and they had learned from their Savior for three years. They watched their Savior, Teacher and the Man they loved go to the cross and die. They became disheartened, yet because Jesus' promises are true, He said He would be raised from the dead and He was. Their faith was strengthened as He showed them His hands and feet and taught them the things of the Kingdom after His death, burial and resurrection. For 40 days He walked and talked with them and was seen by 500 or more men at a single time. Their lives were never the same.

For the last 18 years the disciples were doing exactly what they were called to do. One of Jesus' last commands was to go and preach the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea and to the uttermost parts of the world. In Acts 1:8 He says, *"You will be my witnesses."* That's exactly what they had been doing for the last 18 years: fanning the flame of the gospel, not only in their hometown of Jerusalem but into the uttermost parts of the world.

The Apostle

The gospel's influence was moving further and further out. They were no longer just in Jerusalem or Judea, but they had moved into modern day Turkey and, as we learn in First and Second Thessalonians, into the northern part of Greece as well. So the gospel was expanding. But this letter wasn't written by Peter, James, John, or any of the original 12 apostles. It was written by Paul. Paul was not one of the original disciples. He said he was an apostle of abnormal birth (1 Corinthians 15:8). Not an abnormal physical birth, but he was given the office of apostle through an extraordinary encounter with Jesus Christ.

Acts 9 says that Paul wasn't even his original name; he was born with the name Saul of Tarsus. He was a devout man in all things of the Jewish culture and religion. He was so devout that he hated this new sect of believers called Christians. As a young rabbi and priest in the temple courts, he was given the charge to eradicate Christianity. In many ways he was doing what ISIS is doing today in the Middle East and other places in our world: eradicating Christianity once and for all.

While on a journey to Damascus, with the intention of imprisoning and killing Christians for preaching the gospel, Paul encountered Jesus. This hate-filled individual who was hell-bent on destroying Christianity encountered Jesus Christ. In a Damascus second he turned from being a hater of the gospel to a recipient of it. He met Jesus Christ, saw Him face to face and bowed the knee to Him.

What a great reminder that if the hate-filled Saul of Tarsus can change in a moment and bow the knee to Jesus, then that jerk in the cubicle next to you, or that family member who is so cold to the gospel can also bow the knee. No one in the entire world is too far for the grasp of the gospel of our Father in heaven. So Saul bowed the knee and is now a new man with a new name: Paul.

So we learn that Paul was an apostle. We're not told that in 1 Thessalonians, but in all of his other letters he announced himself as an apostle—one who was given the charge to be a leader and teacher of the fledgling new churches. The Apostle Paul's name literally means small. Paul was small. We don't know why he was given this distinction but many times names defined who people were or explained something about them. Many early church historians believed that Paul was a short man who was not

all that awe inspiring. In fact, one church historian put it this way: “Paul was a diminutive man, not given to good looks or a man of great eloquence. He was a simple man who was not suitable for the king’s court, but God would use the foolish things of the world, like men like Paul, to shame the wise.”

This is again a reminder that God by His grace uses small and ordinary people to change the world. Paul was used to further the gospel more than any other individual in all of Scripture and probably all of human history. Paul penned more of the New Testament than any other individual. We are indebted, probably second only to Jesus Christ, to the Apostle Paul who wrote these two letters to the Thessalonians.

His associates

In verse one it lists Paul, Silas and Timothy. As you read the letters of Paul in the New Testament, even a child in a very casual reading of the text will recognize one truth about the Apostle Paul: Paul never served as a lone-ranger Christian when it came to ministry. He always had a team of people with him. We see that in his introductions to each of his letters. He was always writing with someone else at his side. At the end of many of his letters he stops and gives thanks for dozens of people who had served well with him. He never did it by himself.

Our church isn’t driven by one person doing the entire ministry but hopefully, just as we saw in the All-in Campaign, it takes an entire church to do the ministry and gospel work that we have been called to by God Himself. Paul had friends and ministry partners that were working and serving alongside him.

The first was Silas, also known as Silvanus. The name Silvanus literally means “a man of the forest.” Silvan means “woods” or “many trees.” To help you understand where we get this word, one of our states has the name Silvan in it: Pennsylvania—the woods of William Penn. So maybe this man was born in a forest or maybe he looked like a tree. We’re not sure. He is mentioned about a dozen times in the Scriptures. Many of those times are just simply mentioning his name. It must have been encouraging for this man Silas, who wasn’t known for a lot, to see and hear his name when letters were read out loud in the churches. If your name has ever been mentioned in the news or newspaper at a very noteworthy event, you know that you look forward to seeing or hearing your name. Silas wasn’t in the newspaper, but even greater, he’s found in the cannon of Scripture.

What do we know about this man? We don’t know him as a man who just simply lived but he was a man of great character and abilities. In Acts 15 we learn a little bit about Silas. The context of Acts 15 is that the church was experiencing great growth in and around Jerusalem, then the disciples were moving out into Judea and saw not only Jews but also Gentiles coming to know Christ. It created a crisis of faith. “What do we do when a Gentile comes into our midst and accepts Jesus Christ? Where do our customs as Jewish people begin and end? Where do the new Christian customs come into play?” So they began to have questions and quarrels among themselves. “What was required to be a believer?”

So in Acts 15 the apostles and elders of these various churches gathered together to be part of the first council of churches called the Jerusalem Council. The Apostle James led it and the Apostle Paul was there with Peter, John and others. They struggled with the question of how they were to minister to Gentile believers. They came up with a plan and told the Gentiles what was required of them to be followers of Jesus Christ, abandoning many Jewish traditions that they once thought were imperative to be a Christian, so that every tribe, tongue and nation could enter into the Kingdom of God.

Acts 15:22–27 says:

²²Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. ²³With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

²⁴We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—²⁶men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.

At this point in church history Silas was given the most important information to send out to the churches. Notice what it says about these four men, including Silas: they were “*men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” How great would it be if the only thing that God ever said about you was that you risked your life for the gospel! You don’t need to write

chapters about me, you don't need to tell people of all my personal achievements. If my tombstone says, "This man risked his life for the gospel of Jesus Christ," I will die a fulfilled and content man. That was what was announced regarding Silas.

Many church scholars believe that he was one of the first elders affirmed by the congregation and apostles. In fact, in Acts 15:36 He joined up with Paul on his missionary journey. It says, *"Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.'"* So they had traveled to each of the churches and then Paul said, "Hey, let's go back and start growing these churches. Let's teach them what it means to be maturing believers in Christ."

Picking up at verse 37: *"Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work."* Barnabas, who was an encouraging figure, wanted to take with them a young man named John Mark, who had quit on an earlier missions trip. Paul said, "Wait a minute. John Mark isn't ready for prime time. We need to let him mature a little bit more because when we were in the thick of ministry he took off running. He's not ready to serve and honor God in this capacity yet. Let's leave him home."

Then it says, *"They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company."* It was a big deal. This shows us that we as Christians will at times have sharp disagreements with one another. Even the best believers, like Paul and Barnabas, did. But they dealt with it and they came to an agreement. Even though they disagreed on John, they agreed that they were both called to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the world. *"Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."* So Paul and Silas went out on their journey. Silas was a reputable man, a leading man in the church, who risked his life for the Kingdom.

The next name is Timothy. Turn to Acts 16:1-5:

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. ²The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Timothy was a young man whom Paul seemed to gravitate toward very quickly. He was born into a mixed-faith home from mixed backgrounds. Your pastor's name is Timothy because I have a mother who is European/western and a father who is Middle Eastern. That's the reason for my name. This Timothy's parents were of mixed background and from an early age he was taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. It took hold and as a young man he turned heads, even the head of the Apostle Paul.

He wasn't a perfect man. He was a timid man who had a weak stomach. In fact, he was told numerous times to treat his weak stomach with all sorts of remedies, including drinking wine (1 Timothy 5:23). Timothy's timidity at times caused trouble because he did not confront people, especially as a young pastor serving in the city of Ephesus, the recipient of the letter of Ephesians. Paul also wrote two letters to Timothy about what it means to be a strong pastor. This young man grew in maturity and with the help of the Apostle Paul, his spiritual father, the church at Ephesus grew in number and maturity under the leadership and pastoral vision of Timothy.

So Paul had these two men with him and they embarked on Paul's second missionary journey. It began with a vision called The Macedonian Call. Acts 16:9-10 says:

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So Paul had a vision of a man standing before him. I don't know how he knew he was Macedonian. Maybe he had a Macedonian soccer shirt on or something. Maybe they had a certain look to them. But he saw a man from Macedonia and the man said, "Come and preach to us! Come and help us!" And Paul said, "It wasn't bad pizza that I had but this is a calling from God Himself." So there was enough there for Paul to say, "God is not calling us to go to Asia Minor (Turkey), but to go to Macedonia (modern day Greece)." So they departed on their journey.

Their adversity

So we know where they were going, who went with him and that they encountered adversity. Let's look at how the journey goes. If you look at this map, you can see that they began in the city of Antioch (modern day Syria) and then headed to modern day

Turkey—Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch and Troas. They were given this vision in Antioch to go to another part of the world where they had not been: Greece.

Notice what happened when they got to the left-hand side of the map in Greece. In Acts 16:11–12 it says that they followed the calling and set out from Troas making a direct voyage to Neopolis. From there they went to the city of Philippi to which Paul later wrote the letter to the Philippians. What happened in Philippi? They preached the gospel and a very prominent woman—Lydia—came to know Jesus with much of her household. Because of that, a church was birthed in Philippi.

Around that time, as they were starting to see converts in Philippi, a young woman who was possessed by demons and used for lucrative gain by her masters because she had some sort of fortune-telling ability came to Paul and begged him to have the demon within her exorcised.

Paul, by the grace of God, was given the strength and gift to exorcise that demon, and what happened? You would think they would have had a parade. People were coming to know Jesus and demons were being cast out of them. What a great day! What a great opportunity! You're having converts and God is using you to do great things. This must have been awesome. The three of them must have been high fiving. "God is good! Everything is great! They're going to give us a key to the city of Philippi."

No, that's not what they do. Starting in Acts 16:19 it says,

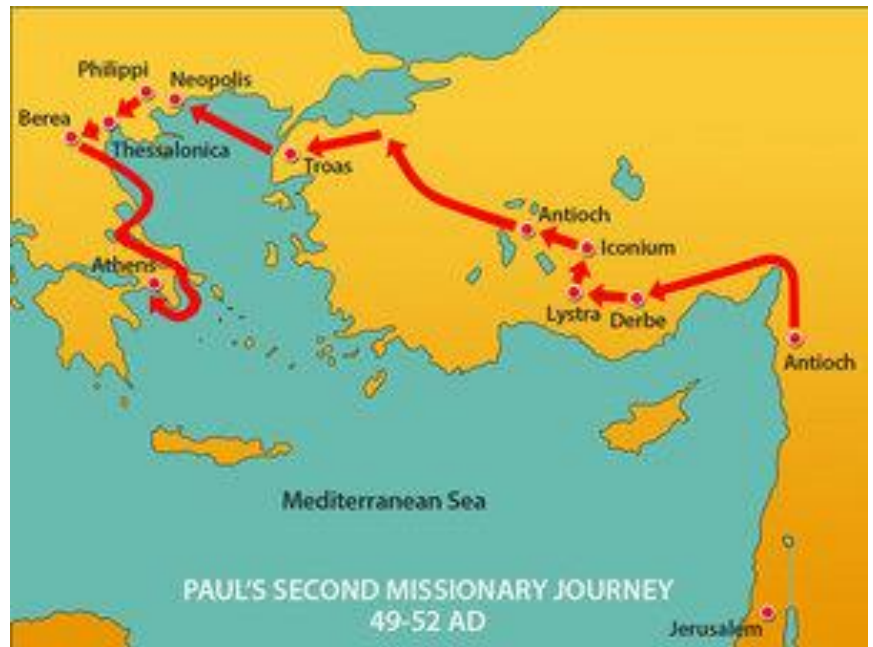
¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Think for a moment if you're Timothy and Silas. The Lord gives you a call. You're following the great Apostle Paul and he says, "The Lord has given me a vision. We need to go to Macedonia." They must have said, "You're great, Paul! This is right. Look at all these great things happening." Put yourself in their shoes. You're getting beaten. If I was there I know what I'd be saying to Paul. "Paul, are you sure you got it right? Are you sure Macedonia was it? Are you sure it wasn't Montana or somewhere else because we're getting the snot kicked out of us! I'm going to be honest with you, this isn't much fun."

But we know God uses trials and tribulations for a reason. They were beaten within an inch of their lives, thrown into the inner prison and chained up. If you are like me, you would think we would find in Acts 16 that they were whining and pleading their case to go back home. But Acts 16:25 says, "*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*" Wow! If that doesn't shock and impress you something is wrong. You do not understand what's taking place. They were beaten within an inch of their lives and instead of getting angry with God they were praising Him amidst great adversity. And God used it.

A great earthquake took place and the chains fell off their bodies. The doors were opened up and all of the prisoners could have run for their lives and for freedom. But something had transpired in the prison that night with Paul and Silas and God had changed the prisoners' hearts. They were found free in the eyes of the Lord and they recognized they were still prisoners under the watchful eye of the jailer. The jailer was freaking out because he knew his prisoners had been set free. Fearing that everyone was gone, he was ready to commit suicide. But Paul said, "Don't do it! We're all here." The jailer was amazed. "Why would men with the opportunity for freedom not leave?" Then Paul preached the gospel to him.

In Acts 16:30–31 the Philippian jailer said, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" And they said, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*" Paul then baptized the jailer and his entire family that night.



The Philippian magistrate learned that they had beaten Roman citizens without a trial and they were freaking out. You couldn't beat Roman citizens—just like in America, the Roman Empire had due process for all of their citizens. They had rights. “We've done wrong so we need to release these guys.” They went to the Philippian jailer and said, “Let them go and tell them they have to leave.” But Paul said, “I'm a Roman citizen. I deserve an apology. You come and take me out so everyone knows I'm not a criminal and I will go.”

So Paul and Silas left Philippi, went to Thessalonica and started preaching the Word. People came to know Christ and were changed. Then what happened? The same thing that happened in Philippi. A mob came to beat them and kick them out of the city. The Thessalonian people found out that this was going to happen and they sent Paul out in the middle of the night so that he would not be abused again.

Then he went to the neighboring city of Berea and preached the gospel. The Bereans were a noble people because they validated the teaching of Paul through the Scriptures. And what happened there? Guys from Thessalonica came and started raising a rabble again.

What does this teach us? It teaches us about what ministry looks like. Sometimes we get this idea that everything went well for the disciples and that things should go well for us as well. But ministry is a series of ups and downs. You can go from mountain peak opportunities to the valley of the shadow of death. They would go from great peaks to great depths, all in a matter of moments.

We have an open door theology when it comes to the will and plan of God. We think that God only works through open doors. So we're always looking for the escape hatch when we come to a door that is closed. Many times the closed door is the exact place you should be. God will open His door when He is good and ready. Some of us are plowing through doors; some of us are looking for other open doors because we think God only works through open doors. God works through closed doors in the same way He works through opened doors.

Maybe right now you're in the hallway of a trial or tribulation and you're saying, “Obviously I must be out of the will of God.” Maybe you are smack dab in the middle of it. As Paul journeyed from Thessalonica to Berea he went to Athens and then Corinth. In Corinth he said that he came to them with weakness, fear and trembling. He was a broken man. And that's why he gushed over the people in Thessalonica. This is a great reminder to us so that we can have better context for what we will study in the days to come.

2. Remembering the People & Place that Received the Letter

Now that we know who wrote the letter and the context of what was going on in Paul's life and the life of his associates, we have to remember to whom he was writing. The text tells us in 1 Thessalonians that it was written to the church of the Thessalonians. What do we need to know about them?

First of all, as we approach this series we need to remember that we are reading other people's mail. We went to the mailbox of the Thessalonians and we grabbed the letter in their mailbox. We opened it and we're reading it. In many churches today you hear this idea that the original audience and original times don't matter. So they read a text and a pastor immediately goes to application. He says, “Here's how you apply it.” Here's the problem: you have faster sermons that way but you miss the entire reason for why it was written. Many reasons why people are immature Christians is that they're simply applying messages that are connected to nothing, and the pulpit becomes a Dr. Phil show instead of the preaching and proclamation of the Word of God.

We are reading a letter written to the Thessalonians. We need to know who they were, where they lived, why they were enduring some of the things they were enduring, and who was writing to them. Once we've done the hard work of exposing the Scripture for what it is, then we can apply what is applicable to our lives.

Location

They are in Thessalonica, which was a city in the northeastern part of modern-day Greece. Thessalonica was founded four centuries before Christ. It was eventually given the name Thessalonica after Alexander the Great's half-sister, who was also his wife. By the time of Paul's writing, Thessalonica had become a city of about 200,000 people, which is about the size of the city of Aurora. Today, Thessalonica is the second largest city in Greece and still has the same name. You can go to Thessalonica today,

probably with a connection through Athens. Right now it's a city of about 300,000 people with a metro area of almost one million. It's a happening and bustling city today.

As a coastal city on a large body of water, Thessalonica was a great spot for trade from its ports to all of the known world. It wasn't just known for its seafaring ability as a coastal city, but in the middle of Thessalonica there was a roadway called the Via Egnatia, which was the largest highway in all of the Roman Empire. It went from Rome, down through Greece, all the way to the Far East. So this was a strategic city because if the church was doing what it was supposed to be doing, people would come into Thessalonica on their way to the far most parts of the world and hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and be changed.

Lifestyle

The city was predominantly Greek. That means there was all sorts of Polytheism. The famed Mount Olympus can be seen from almost every part of Thessalonica. Because of that the saturation of Greek mythology and Greek gods would have been prevalent. There were a decent number of Jews in this city and there was a synagogue. You can't have a synagogue without a large number of Jews in the area. Acts 17 says that the first place Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica was in the synagogue.

There were all sorts of other individuals there as well, with different backgrounds, customs and understandings of Who God was. Paul, for a short time, was able to share the good news of Jesus and teach them who they were.

We learn a little bit about their lifestyle from the letter to the Thessalonians. They were an idolatrous people. Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:9: *"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."* They were an immoral group of people. First Thessalonians 4:4-5 says, *"Each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God."* So they were an idolatrous and immoral people.

Thessalonica was no different than America today—idolatrous and immoral. So the words we are going to apply from this can also be applied to Hinckley, Aurora, Sugar Grove, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. We can apply this because many of the same sins that were going on in Thessalonica are going on in the world that we live in today.

3. Recognizing the Purpose behind the Writing of the Letter

What caused Paul to write this letter? Paul had limited time with them and he had to leave under duress in the middle of the night. He was never able to say his goodbyes or share any parting thoughts. While he was away he penned these words and sent Timothy and Silas to give this letter to them. As he put ink to parchment he told them, "Continue in godliness." How do we do this?

Encourage Christians to grow in their walk

There are two ways that you can motivate people as a leader. You can demand them and be a dictator, telling them all the consequences that will come if they don't follow your commands. Paul didn't do this. Paul chose the second way: love on them. Minister to them. Lead them by example. Give them something to imitate and encourage them all the way. Paul wrote a letter gushing about the love he had for the people.

We see this throughout the book. Chapter one, verse two: *"We give thanks to God always for all of you."* Verse two says, "When we pray, we're praying for you." Verse four says, *"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you."* Verse seven says that they had become an example. He goes on in chapter two in verse eight and says, "We are affectionately desirous for you. We love you!" In verse twelve he says, *"We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you."* Verses 17-18 say, *"We endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you."* In chapter three, verse six, he says, *"But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love..."* Encouragement, encouragement, encouragement.

As the year 2016 comes about, the elders and I are encouraged at the growth, humility and maturity that this church continues to show. We were at a funeral yesterday and a person who attended Village Bible Church years ago came. He said, "I want to encourage you, Pastor. I remember back in the day when we were attending Village, all of the news that came out of the church was bad—disharmony, disunity, troubles, pastors coming in and out. But for the last ten to twelve years all I hear about Village in

the community is good stuff. You've got a great name in the community. Keep it up!" That's not because of your pastoral staff or me. That's because of you. You're doing a good work. Be encouraged!

Don't let that turn to pride. Don't begin to think that you're doing that without the work of the grace of God in your life. Paul says, "I want to encourage you that you're doing a good job, Thessalonica." You're doing a good job, Village Bible Church.

Create a spirit of endurance no matter what we face

In the next couple of weeks, we're going to learn that Paul will defend himself against the accusations of his detractors. He's going to speak of hard work and determination. He says, "I'm going to stay the course amidst the beatings and the horrible events that have happened in my life. Even though mobs come and attack me and I have hardships all around me, I am going to work hard. You've seen me work hard." He will talk about how difficult it is to be a pastor and have another job—I recognize this now more than ever. That was the Apostle Paul in the church at Thessalonica. He preached the gospel by day and made tents by night. He was working hard. He says, "I know you're doing a good job. Trouble and hardships are going to come but keep working hard." In 2 Thessalonians 2 he commands all of us to not grow idle but work hard unto the Lord and for the gospel. "Keep up the good work," is what he's saying. Don't stop serving.

Instill a hopeful expectation for the future

The Apostle Paul will address issues of eschatology—the doctrine of end times or last things. He will talk about things like the second coming of Jesus. He will talk about the rising of the man of lawlessness, the antichrist. In this series he will talk about times of tribulation. He is not going to say, "Oh my goodness! What are we going to do? What's going to happen?" He doesn't give times and dates. He doesn't look at the newspaper to figure out when these times and dates are going to come. He does it with a hopeful expectation, knowing (in 2 Thessalonians) that Jesus Christ is coming back. And because He says He's coming back, He will do just as He says. We, too, will live in bleak times. We, too, are given to the idea that evil is advancing and persecution is growing around the world, and we're starting to taste some of that even here in this country.

Paul's words are not alarmist in nature. Even though we may be scared, even though we may feel hopeless, Paul gives the idea that the end times are not a time to be worried and fearful but times that with each day we draw closer to being with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And so he tells us at the end of the letter in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 that the Lord of peace gives you peace in all times and in every way. We don't need to fret; we don't need to be worried. In fact, he tells the people that the very essence of living in the end times should cause us to encourage one another. Every day we're another Sabbath day closer to the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We're closer to glory, and so we don't need to worry about the man of lawlessness or tribulation or persecution. Those times will come, and those times we may experience. And as a result of that it will grow our faith because the Lord of comfort will comfort us in those moments. But what we need to do is continue to work hard and hasten the day of the Lord's coming.

So Paul finishes verse one and he says, *"To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace."* What a fitting way to end the first verse of our study. How many of us in 2016, in the first work week of the year, could use grace and peace? Let us make this our prayer as we close: that God will give us grace and peace; that He will empower us and fill us with grace and peace so that we may be ready with the strength for today and hope for tomorrow; that we might encourage the believers around us, evangelize the unbelievers among us, and exalt the God Who has saved us.