



FAITH UNDER PRESSURE

1 Thessalonians

Growth Group Studies

Gympie
Presbyterian
Church

Welcome to Growth Groups for term 3. We live in a time when some Australian Christians are feeling their faith is under pressure. Although it's never been easy to live for Jesus (the Bible says so!) in some contexts it can feel like there are more social and cultural pressures making it hard to hold onto Jesus and live and speak for him.

The two letters written to the church in Thessalonica are some of the earliest New Testament writings (probably only Galatians was written earlier). In this letter we read about the various pressures the earliest believers experienced around friendship, work, sex, death, and continuing to trust and rest in Jesus—sound familiar? Just as God used this letter to strengthen and encourage this very early church, our prayer is he'll continue to strengthen and encourage us through 1 Thessalonians.

How to get the most out of Growth Groups

As we meet together in Growth Groups our goal is to *grow* in Christ—to *grow* in our knowledge of God, our love for one another, and our passion and ability to reach our region with the gospel.

Central to Growth Groups is God's Word because God grows his people through his Word. God is also at work through one another other, as we share our lives, encourage each other, and pray for each other.

So how can you get the most out of Growth Groups?

1. Be praying for your Growth Group. Pray for other members, pray for the group times, that God would be working to grow us in Christian maturity.
2. Read the Bible passage before the group meets. Some weeks we'll be reading quite a bit from Acts, so it may help to familiarise yourself with the general outline of the passage before the group meets.
3. Get into the discussion by asking questions. A key part of how we dig into God's Word together is through discussion—and asking questions is the best way to get the discussion going. That's why our study booklets are mainly questions...they're a tool to help us dig! And it's good to remember there are no silly or wrong questions—if it's something you're wondering about, someone else is probably wondering the same thing (or they'd love to work with you to find the answer).
4. Beware of study notes. Study Bibles are great resources—they have tools like maps, indexes, timelines, and diagrams that can really help summarise and illustrate parts of the Bible. But sometimes in study groups, study Bible notes can prevent us from digging into God's Word. They take the discussion away from looking closely at God's Word and away from engaging with and encouraging one another. They can be a good tool—but only if handled with care!
5. Share what God's doing in your life. Things that are encouraging and you want to thank God for, things that are concerning and you need supportive prayer.

If you've been part of a small group before, I'm sure you can think of other things too!

Credits

These studies have been developed with assistance from material from Maroochydoore, Kenmore, and Burdekin Presbyterian Churches.

Images and maps are credited as they appear.

7. In verses 5-9 we see the opposition to the early church was immediate. Jason, a new convert who offered hospitality to Paul, was singled out by a ravenous mob! What motivated the mob's anger and what action did they take?

8. What opposition do you face, right now, as a follower of Jesus? What motivates this opposition?

9. Look again at verse 7. What were Paul and his co-worker accused of doing? Is this a good summary of the Christian message?

10. Write down your own, one-line summary of the Christian message (aka the gospel) and share it with the group.

The Curly Question

If we're *not* experiencing suffering and opposition in the Christian life, has something gone wrong?



Faith Under Pressure

1 Thessalonians 1

For starters

Have you ever had a moment when you felt the pressure of being a follower of Jesus? How did you respond?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-6

1. What does Paul thank God for? What does this teach us about the priorities of the Christian life?
2. What does Paul believe lies behind the Thessalonians' *work, labour, and endurance*?
3. In verse 4, Paul says he knows God has *chosen* the believers in Thessalonica. What evidence gives Paul this confidence (hint: look at verses 3, 5, and 6)?
4. How is the Bible's teaching of God's *election* (aka God's *choice*) a basis for comfort and assurance?
5. Are you chosen by God? How can you be sure?
6. How is it possible for the Thessalonians to have joy in suffering?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

7. The Thessalonians became *model Christians* for believers in the surrounding area (you might want to look at the map to see the regions mentioned in verse 7). What Christ-like models have you been inspired to imitate? How might we be 'model believers' to others?

8. Look again at verse 8 where we see the influence of the Thessalonian church. What are our spheres of influence? How might our church also impact others?

9. In verses 9-10 we see four steps of Christian conversion: *receive, turn, serve, wait*. Reflect on your own story—have you had the same experience?

The Curly Question

The believers in Thessalonica *turned* from idols to *serve* the living and true God. Their idols were (most likely) statues and images of pretend gods. But what about us? What do you think are the top five idols in Gympie?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Which of these idols is most attractive to you? Let's pray that we might turn from these idols, and serve God as we wait for Christ's return!



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Motivated by the Gospel

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

For starters

Has anyone ever tried to peddle a product or idea to you with selfish motives? What was the result?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1. Re-read verses 1-6 and list (a) the *right* ways to lead God's people and (b) the *wrong* ways to lead.
2. What do you think motivates Paul? What is Paul trying to use to motivate believers?
3. Paul sees himself (and his co-workers, maybe even all believers) as being *entrusted* with the gospel. How does seeing ourselves as stewards guard us against the wrong ways of living and leading listed above?
4. Paul compares his ministry with a *steward* (v4), a *mother* (v7), and a *father* (v11). What qualities of stewards, mothers, and fathers are important for Christian leaders?
5. Look again at verse 8. Is it possible to share the gospel without sharing our lives as well? What impact should this make to how we approach church?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

6. The final image Paul uses for Christian ministry is being a herald or messenger (verse 13). Paul talks about his (human) message as being 'the word of God'. How would you explain to someone today that the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is both the words of people and the Word of God at the same time?

7. How should we approach the Bible if it is, indeed, the Word of God?

8. We don't always like hearing about God's wrath. How do you think the Jewish opponents have 'heap[ed] up their sins'? How has God's wrath come upon them?

The Curly Question

How are we going to find (and be) Christian leaders with all these qualities?



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Firm Faith

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

For starters

Who (past or present) encourages you in your Christian walk? How do they encourage you?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

1. How does Paul feel about the believers in Thessalonica? Why do you think he tells them this?
2. Look at verse 18. Sometimes Paul says similar blockages are brought about by God (e.g. Acts 16:6-7). What do you make of attributing this blockage to Satan?
3. Is there something you want to do for the Lord, but believe you are being prevented from doing?
4. What do you think Paul means by saying the Thessalonians are his *crown, glory, and joy*?
5. Why did Paul send Timothy? What did he hope to achieve?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

6. How does Paul feel when he hears Timothy's report?
7. One of the greatest joys in the Christian life is hearing of someone becoming a Christian or persevering in Christ through trials. Can you share any examples that have given you encouragement?
8. How do you encourage the faith of others? What encourages you to stand firm in the Lord?

9. In verses 11-13 we read Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians. What does he ask God to do in and through this church?

The curly question

Why does God so often make us wait?

Prayer

Verses 11-13 are a great prayer for our growth group and our church. Finish by praying a prayer like these verses.

Pleasing God

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

For starters

“One of the great weaknesses of contemporary evangelical Christianity is our comparative neglect of Christian ethics, in both our teaching and our practice. In consequence, we have become known rather as people who preach the gospel than as those who live and adorn it.” John Stott

What do you think about this? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

1. Is Paul disappointed with the progress of the Thessalonians? If not, why does Paul urge them to live to please God *more and more*? Does this mean God is never satisfied/pleased with us?
2. On what authority does Paul make his appeal? How does this shape how we're to read this passage today?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-12

3. How does Paul explain what he means by *sanctified*?¹
4. Why was Paul so concerned about the Thessalonians avoiding sexual immorality? Are there any similarities between their highly sexualised culture and ours?
5. How might we *wrong* a brother or sister or *take advantage* of them? How does sexual immorality hurt people (including ourselves)?

¹ The word *sanctify* is related to the idea of holiness.

6. What should motivate holy living?

7. How is *love for one another* an antidote to sexual immorality?

8. In what practical ways does Christian love show itself? In what ways should Christians be *ambitious*, how might this be different from how we often think of ambition?

9. How can the lives of the Thessalonians win the respect of outsiders? Is the same true for us?

The Curly Question

Should a Christian aspire to be the ‘top of the field’ at work, culture, or sport?



What Happens When We Die?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

For starters

Think about a recent funeral you attended, or heard about. How did people talk about what had happened and about death? Why do you think we talk this way?

This week we'll focus on what this passage teaches about how believers face life and death. We'll look at this passage (and into chapter 5) next week and consider in more detail the coming of Jesus.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1. Some say *ignorance is bliss*. Why is this not true for Christians and death? How does knowing the truth help us *grieve with hope*?
2. How does Jesus' death and resurrection give believers hope, even in the face of death?
3. Does the Bible say Christians should not be sad when someone dies? What does verse 13 mean?
4. Why was the death of Christians in Thessalonica causing their brothers and sisters to doubt?

5. Why do you think Paul says, in verse 14, that believers have *fallen asleep* rather than *died*?

6. What does it mean for you to know death is not the end? How does this inspire us to proclaim the good news of Jesus?

7. What does it mean for grief to be shaped by hope? How have you experienced this?

8. How would the description of the return of King Jesus have given hope to those grieving the death of believers? How does it give us hope?

9. What ultimate future is the source of Christian hope?

10. How could you encourage someone with these truths?

The Curly Question

Jesus said to the thief on the cross: '**Today** you'll be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43) How does this fit with *those who have fallen asleep* in Christ who are now awaiting his return?

Faith That Waits

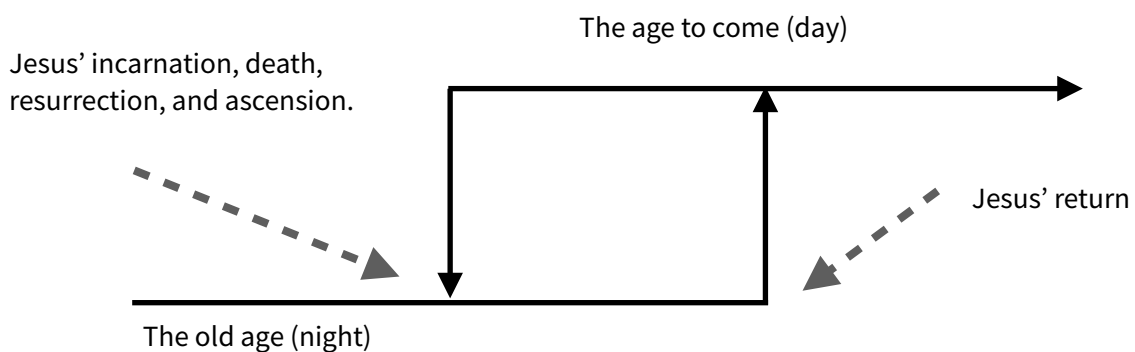
1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

For starters

Do you have anyone in your life who is preparing for something big in the future? How do they go about their preparations?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

1. Since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, people have tried to predict when he would return. What is so appealing about *times and dates*? Why does Paul tell us not to speculate (see also Acts 17:31)?
2. How is the coming (return) of Jesus like a *thief* or *labour pains*? Will the day come as a surprise to believers? Why or why not?
3. Although we don't know when, how is the return of Jesus described? What do you think is significant about this description?
4. Because of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, we now live in the 'overlap of the ages' or the 'now but not yet' of God's kingdom (see diagram below). How does the language of *light* and *darkness* explain the times we're in?



5. List the attitudes and behaviour of those who *belong to the night* and those who *belong to the day*.

6. Instead of speculating about *times and dates* what should we do as we wait for Jesus to return? How does the certain promise of Jesus' return change how we live now?

7. How does Jesus' death and promised return give us (a) urgency in evangelism and (b) comfort for the future?

8. Where in our current culture and churches do you see the assumption of *peace and safety*?

The Curly Question

'God did not appoint us to suffer wrath.' Does this mean God has appointed some people to suffer wrath?



Life as we Wait

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

For starters

Has anyone left you with any memorable parting words? What made those words so memorable?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

1. What are the responsibilities of church leaders towards those they lead?
2. What are the responsibilities of all believers to church leaders?
3. Why do churches (and leaders!) sometimes find it hard to *live in peace with each other*?
4. Based on verses 14-15, what attitude should we have towards believers in different situations?
5. What sort of people (or problems people have) make you impatient?
6. Why do you think verse 15 says *make sure nobody pays back wrong for wrong* rather than *don't repay wrong with wrong*? How does repaying wrongs with *doing good* stop further problems?
7. Do verses 16-18 mean Christians must always be happy? How can we give thanks, even when our faith is under pressure?
8. What standard must we use to test alleged messages from the Holy Spirit? (Also read 1 John 4:1-3)

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