

CLOSER LOOK



A LIFEGROUP STUDY ON THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

Not Without Hope
Don't Throw In The Towel
1 Thessalonians 3:1-7
January 22, 2022

MAIN POINT

God provides hope and encouragement in the person of Jesus Christ and His church.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the best team experience you have ever been a part of? What made it so great?

Have you ever felt uniquely supported or encouraged by a boss, coach, or teacher? What did they do to make you feel this way?

Have you ever been uniquely taken care of by the church during a difficult season? When was it and how did they support you?

No person is exempt from the difficulties and trials of this life. For Christians around the world, there is an added layer of persecution that comes with following Jesus. Thankfully, God has given us help to endure faithfully in the midst of challenging circumstances. In our study today, we will look at how God provides hope and encouragement in the person of Jesus Christ and His church.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer or volunteers read Acts 17:1-10.

Explain: I want to make sure we unpack what is happening in these verses before we go deeper.

What was Paul doing in Thessalonica? How did the people receive his message?

Paul spent about three weeks in Thessalonica teaching in the synagogue, reasoning from the Scriptures that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. As a result, Paul saw some of the Jews, several Greeks, and “quite a few” prominent women in the community come to faith.

What happened as a result of Paul’s teaching? Why were the Jews jealous?

With success came the attention of Jewish leaders in the area. They were jealous of Paul, who was growing a large following. Jewish leaders recruited “wicked men” to start a mob in the city. They also accused Paul and Silas of rebellion against the Roman government by claiming Jesus as their king. As a result, Paul and Silas had to flee the city. The church in Thessalonica faced similar persecution.

Have a volunteer(s) read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3.

Why was Timothy sent to Thessalonica?

Timothy was sent to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the church there. Paul was only able to spend about three weeks with the Thessalonians before being forced out of the city.

Why did the Thessalonians need this strengthening and encouragement? What were they facing?

To Paul’s joy, the church was still thriving and living faithfully despite the persecution they experienced. Paul and Silas set an example for the Thessalonians that the hope of the gospel, our eternal life in Christ, gives us strength to endure persecution. Jesus and His message are worth any opposition we may face!

Read 1 Corinthians 15:57-58.

We contend for the world, but will often be rejected by it. How does the hope of the gospel give Christians strength to endure faithfully?

Even when Paul could not physically be with the Thessalonians, he made sure they were encouraged, supported, and cared for. Who has done the same for you in your own life? Who are you serving in this way?

Have a volunteer(s) read 1 Thessalonians 3:4-7.

The Thessalonians were new to their faith in Christ, and Paul worried about their spiritual health. Did you have someone come alongside you when you were new to faith? Who and what impact did they have?

In these verses, Paul responds to the report Timothy gave him. How were the Thessalonians doing?

What about the Thessalonians' faith encouraged Paul? How can we be encouraged in our faith by the Thessalonians?

We see mutual encouragement in the relationship between Paul and the church in Thessalonica that provided hope in the midst of the trials they were facing. What a blessing it is, that God has given us a spiritual community, the church, to both bless and be blessed by. When we are facing trials, suffering, or persecution, we have a community of believers who can comfort us, and whose faith can encourage us to continue to walk in obedience and faithfulness.

Has the faith of another person ever encouraged or strengthened your faith? Who and how did they live faithfully?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scriptures apply directly to their lives.

Explain: It's often challenging to let what is true in Scripture be true in our lives, that's what growing in our faith is all about. Let's try and think on how that could be more and more true for us.

What practices or disciplines could you implement to strengthen your faith for when you face trials or persecution?

Who do you know that is in the midst of a trial or challenging season? How can you be an encouragement to them?

Are you currently facing a trial or difficult circumstance? How can our group support and encourage you during this time?

LP PRAYER POINTS

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PRAYER REQUESTS

Take a moment to ask your group if there are any prayer requests.

PRAY WITH YOUR GROUP

Pray over your group's prayer requests, along with the following prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for the hope that you offer us in Jesus. That this life, our circumstances, are not the end of the story and that there is victory over sin and death in the resurrection of Jesus. When we face trials and difficulties, help us to lean into this truth. Thank you, Lord, for the gift of community. Thank you for people who will support and encourage us in difficult seasons. Help each of us to be more than consumers of the church and its ministries, use us to minister and care for those in our church that need it. Amen.

LP REMINDERS

- January 22 - Baptisms
- January 29 - Kids Core
- February 12 - Starting Point
- February 12 - Lifepoint Students Super Bowl Party
- February 19 - CORE
- February 26 - Baptisms
- February 26 - Discovering Life
- February 26 - Jumpback Training

MEMORIZE

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57)

COMMENTARY

Acts 17: 1-9 (SmallGroup.com)

17:1–3 The journey from Philippi to Thessalonica followed the Via Egnatia through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia. Each of these cities was about a day's journey apart when traveling by horseback. Luke gave no time frame; and if the company traveled by foot, one would have to assume the 100-mile journey took more than three days and that there were other stopping places than the two major towns Luke designated on their itinerary.

Amphipolis was some thirty miles southwest of Philippi. Formerly capital of the first division of Macedonia and a "free city," it was important for its strategic position, controlling access to the Hellespont and the Black Sea. It would have been a significant place for witness, but Luke did not indicate that Paul carried on any mission there or anywhere else along the route to Thessalonica. He simply

indicated these as stopping places, Appollonia being the next mentioned, some thirty miles from Amphipolis and thirty-eight miles from the final destination of Thessalonica.

Once arrived in Thessalonica, Paul followed his usual pattern of beginning his witness in the synagogue. This continued on three successive Sabbaths (v. 2). This is the only time reference in the Thessalonian narrative, but one would assume from Paul's Thessalonian correspondence that his initial ministry in Thessalonica was of somewhat longer duration. The pattern of Paul's synagogue preaching as indicated in vv. 2–3 is very much that of the preaching to Jews in the earlier portions of Acts. It consisted primarily of scriptural pointers to Christ from the Old Testament. Luke described this as reasoning with them from the Scriptures. This is further elaborated as “explaining” and “proving” that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead.

17:4 “A large number” of the Thessalonian Jews were persuaded by Paul's Old Testament expositions (v. 4), some also of the “God-fearing” Greeks who attended the synagogue. Among the latter group were a number of prominent women. That Luke singled out the influential female converts in the Macedonian congregations (cf. 16:14 and 17:12) is very much in keeping with inscriptional evidence that in Macedonia women had considerable social and civic influence. One should also note the prominence of Silas in this section, particularly in connection with the synagogue witness (vv. 4, 10). He is usually in the background, with the focus being on Paul. It could be that in mentioning him in these synagogue contexts, Luke wanted to remind us of his connection with the Jerusalem church and the Jewish-Christian endorsement of Paul's mission.

17:5 Verses 5–9 depict the opposition to Paul's ministry in Thessalonica initiated by the Jews. They are described as being “jealous,” perhaps at the number of God-fearing Gentiles whom Paul was attracting away from the synagogue and into the Christian community. The Gentiles' presence in the synagogue probably gave the Jewish community a degree of acceptance in the predominantly Gentile city and probably also some financial support. One should not, however, get the impression that it was always the Jews who opposed Paul. In chaps. 16–19 there is an equal balance between opposition initiated by Jews and that begun by Gentiles. Even in this instance, it was ultimately the Gentile populace who opposed Paul. Beginning with the gang of ruffians who hung around the marketplace, the Jews succeeded in rousing the Gentiles into mob action against Paul and Silas.

At this point Jason entered the picture. We know nothing more about him than his role in this scene. Evidently Paul and Silas had been lodging with him. Consequently he probably was a convert and may have been a Jew since Jason was a name often taken by Diaspora Jews. It is also possible that he shared Paul's trade. Later in Corinth Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, who were of the same trade as he (18:3). In any event, the crowd did not find the missionaries at Jason's. Possibly they had learned of the riot and had fled elsewhere.

17:6–7 So Jason served as Paul's proxy and was dragged before the city officials (v. 6). Luke's description is very accurate, using the term “politarchs” for the officials, which is the precise term that occurs for the local magistrates in inscriptions uncovered in Macedonia. Three charges were leveled against the Christians. The first was directed against Paul and Silas: they “caused trouble all over the world.” This was a rather nebulous charge—“troublemakers.” The second was directed against Jason: he was harboring these troublemakers. The third was directed against Paul and Silas and, by implication, Jason as their host. They were said to be “defying Caesar's decrees.” This was a dangerous charge. To defy Caesar would be pure sedition. But what decrees were they defying? Probably

the final clause in v. 7 is to be seen as an explanation of the charge. They were claiming that there was another king than Caesar—Jesus. This was virtually the same charge leveled at Jesus (cf. Luke 23:2–4; John 19:12, 15). Jesus claimed a kingdom not of this world, and Paul and Silas spoke of the same. But to a Roman, the charge sounded very much like a breach of the oath of loyalty that every person in the empire was required to render to Caesar. The magistrates had to take note of this charge.

17:8–9 The magistrates showed a great deal of discretion in handling the charges. They evidently did not take the charge of sedition too seriously, but they were quite aware of the commotion and were responsible for maintaining order. They evidently decided, much like the Philippian magistrates, to preserve law and order by banning the troublemakers from the city. Jason was required to post bond, depositing a sum of money that would be forfeited should there be any sequel to the civil disturbance. That meant the absence of Paul and Silas. Paul may have been referring to this ban in 1 Thess 2:18 when he spoke of “Satan’s hindrance” to his returning to the city.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-7 (SmallGroup.com)

3:1. Paul declared, We could stand it no longer. This is a good reminder that these men of the first century were not cut from flannel graph. They had strong emotions and inner turmoils. Having abruptly left Thessalonica, the missionaries had traveled to Berea, and from there to Athens. In the intervening time there had been little contact or correspondence between them and the Thessalonian church. Leaving a young, inexperienced church would have been difficult for any leader, but Paul and the others knew that these Christians were under great stress from the unbelieving Jews and even the Roman authorities. Paul had experienced the hatred of the Jews in Philippi and Thessalonica as riots, accusations, and arrests swirled around the missionaries and Christian followers. Paul was anxious and worried about how these Thessalonians were being treated and how they were holding up. His concern became so great that he had to do something. He could wait no longer: we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. A plan was put together that would (1) strengthen the Thessalonian church and, (2) get Paul information as to how the believers were doing.

3:2. Paul’s words, We sent Timothy, is a statement of fact, followed by a brief description of Timothy which underscored the high regard Paul held for him. He called Timothy our brother and God’s fellow worker in spreading the gospel. Brother carries the feeling of warm, family relationship. This is how workers in the gospel and members of a local church often felt toward one another. There was a strong tie of community and family. God’s fellow worker is an amazing and gracious title. It is given to Timothy, and all those who work hard and faithfully in the service of Christ. We work alongside the Lord; we are partners with him: “We are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9). This is the highest, most important position anyone can choose—to work together with the Lord in caring about people, to spread the gospel, to love and encourage. Every day we have many opportunities to demonstrate this kind of lifestyle. Paul then stated the purpose of Timothy’s visit: to strengthen and encourage you in your faith. The word strengthen has the literal meaning of supplying a buttress for a wall or building. One of the purposes of Timothy’s visit was to provide strengthening support for their faith. To encourage is to impart courage to another. Timothy was to build their faith so they could withstand the battles around them, the persecutions, the temptations.

3:3. These trials could mean many things. Undoubtedly it referred to the accusations of political subversion which were thrown at the Christians. It could represent all the misunderstandings of their faith that circulated in the city. There may have been those who were trying to deceive the believers, drawing them into Judaism. In all practicality these “trials” are anything which causes Christians to suffer because of their faith. Even so, Paul declared rather boldly, we were destined for them. Paul was not surprised by pain. Christ had

said it first: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Paul knew trouble and trials were part of life, and he had warned the Thessalonians about it.

3:4. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he had warned them about the coming trials when he was with them. Time and again he had told them that hard times lay ahead. These difficulties should not have taken anyone by surprise. Paul had done the Thessalonian believers a great service by this warning, and we do well to warn new believers as well. To let people think that Christ will usher them into a life of ease and unending happiness is not only untrue, but also very harmful. Christ warned us, Paul warned us, and we should make it clear to new believers that difficulties lie ahead in life.

3:5. Paul declared, For this reason ... I sent to find out about your faith. Paul had some fears about the faith of the new believers in Thessalonica. He knew these Christians had faith. That had been proven. But was it strong enough to stand in the assault of persecution and the tempter? He described him as the tempter because Satan’s aim in regard to Christians is always to make them fall into sin and error. It is well to remember that Satan still tries to devour our faith through difficulties. Having been tempted to abandon the faith, Paul was not certain of the result and whether our efforts might have been useless. The maturity of the believer is dependent on his commitment and determination to follow after Christ. There is no guarantee that having once begun well, every believer will finish well. That is why we are to encourage one another, to be diligent in our obedience, and relentless in our desire for righteousness.

3:6. After cataloging all his concerns and the anxiety it had caused, Paul wrote, But. His excitement can almost be felt as he continued, Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. The description of the Thessalonians church caused Paul to write with warmth and enthusiasm as his fears found relief in what Timothy had to say. Faith refers to the Thessalonians’ attitude toward God and their relationship with him. Love, though connected to faith, is more the demonstration of it is expressed toward other people. On both counts, the Thessalonians were doing well. These were the important matters of life. Paul found his greatest joy in people who lived out their faith and love.

3:7. Paul was having a difficult time of it, too. He was always under intense persecution by those who opposed Christ. His life was not easy, and he never pretended it was. Even so, the Thessalonians had brought the missionaries strength and encouragement because of the way they were living—specifically their faith. It had been their faith which had caused Paul such anxiety, and now it was the certainty of their faith that gave Paul the greatest reason for rejoicing.