

American Idol

The Journey Part 3

The Purpose of This Series- This series is entitled “The Journey” particularly for the purpose of learning to live the affective and fruitful life of a believer. These thirteen messages are shared to give the believer, young or old, new or seasoned, a clearer picture of the life intended for them and what God has for them. I believe this series will help the believer tie up some loose end and help them walk with confidence and abundance.

The Purpose of This Message- The message today is a message of hope and power. It is understanding that after becoming a Christian we must learn to follow Christ, sometimes that is found in other peoples examples. God's work in us is to set us on display so that others might be influenced and even be trained to be influential in this world we live in. Our world is full of idols and idol worship. God is looking for someone who will pay the price to live the life so that others can follow. Thessalonians were those people. Their example caused hundreds of others to be encouraged and learned. We would do well to learn of their example and follow pursuit.

1Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith 2We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I Thessalonians 1:1-3

Over the last two weeks we have started a Journey together using the life's of Paul, Silas, Timothy and the Thessalonians through Paul's writings in I Thessalonians. What we have learned is that three people from three totally different background, up bringing, education and experiences entered a community of nearly 200,000 people and within three weeks turned the whole city upside down, if not the world, for Jesus Christ. I Thessalonians, in particular, gives us Paul's insight and detail about how people responded to that teaching.

We learned that **Grace and peace is in response to knowing who you are as a Christian.** This assurance makes you “The Church” in your community, whose God is now your father through the work of Jesus Christ. God now becomes your Father and Jesus becomes Lord in the believer's life. Idolatry was nothing new in the Thessalonian culture and hearing of Christ satisfying the demand for a sacrifice was a delight to hear among the people there.

Paul had a special place in his heart for the Thessalonians. He was thankful for them and often prayed for them because he could see within them appropriate motives that caused them to live healthy Christian lives.

- Instead of fear, insecurities or pride dictating their works, their works were produced by faith.
- Instead of abandonment, rejection or low self-worth influencing their labor, their labor was prompted by love.
- Instead of dominance, controlling or aggression motivating their endurance, their

endurance was inspired by hope.

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.”

I Thessalonians 1:4-5

Last week I taught on I Thessalonians 1:4-5. We learned how Paul was confident in the Thessalonians relationship with Christ because of the evidences of living free was found in them, namely by the three of them knowing them, calling them brothers, loved by God, chosen. And he shares the five contributing factors of why he could assure them of all of these entitlements:

Because the gospel came to them with...

1. Word
2. Power
3. Holy Spirit
4. Deep Conviction
5. An example how to live

That word came with such power that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, it penetrated their thinking, their experiences, their beliefs and brought them to deep conviction. It was a total melt down. And then Paul tells them in verse five that, “**...you know how we lived for your sake.**” Why is that significant? Because when you are dealt with by God's word in this way you have a complete melt down, and you need someone around who will help you be restored as a believer as Paul, Silas and Timothy did. When you receive the fulness of Christ in your life you will have a melt down. You will need to be given an example of how to live. When you are given this gospel without a melt down you will only create God as another idol in your life.

Today, it's important to know that you can be loved, accepted by Christ and God. We can know all our entitlements, understand how to live a healthy Christian life and experience all the major events of the gospel coming into your heart by hearing and responding to God's Word, allowing it to strike you with power, invading you with the Holy Spirit so it brings deep conviction that once again helps you focus on those are are the best examples for living.

But this is our problem today. We can know we are loved. We can know our entitlements. We and understand how to have a healthy Christian life. We can experience God in a Biblical fashion and still not follow Godly examples.

Today we idolize confused and defiant people. We listen to their songs as they angrily yell their disappointments and disapproval. We can't help but be elbowed aside as different “self-rights” groups continue to carry a banner for their own damnable cause, no matter how non-biblical, anti-christ, abusive or perverted they are. It's as if there is a free-for-all to be the King of the hill, who will dictate what you can or cannot do. Push the envelop, color outside the lines, think outside the box. I am incredibly concerned that today we are not only being tempted and challenged to follow people who actually have a cause, but people who are trying to find a cause and millions are getting lost in their search.

Live A Life For Someone Other Than Yourself

Paul finished I Thessalonians 1:5 with this statement,

“You know how we lived among you for your sake.”
I Thessalonians 1:5b

That's a lot like seeing how long you can hold your breath underwater. How long can you live for someone else? As long as you get paid for it? As long as it goes your way? As long as you are seeing fruit? As long as it's fun? As long as you're in control? As long as you want to? Here's another question,

- **If I were to change and become more like you, how would that be a benefit me?**
- **How would that increase the cause of Christ?**

One of the greatest challenges that God calls us to, is to become an example for others to follow. This is such a decisive decision for a believer. It is not something that you talk about and do different, it is something that you will spend years practicing. Becoming a living example is no easy task but it does have a lasting, fruitful challenge. What do you have to do to become a lasting impression?

The American Heritage® Dictionary says that a role model is

“A person who serves as a model in a particular behavioral or social role for another person to emulate.”

What Constitutes a Role Model

Characteristics of positive role models include:

- Feels a sense of duty to better "society" or work for the common good of the community
- Compassionate
- Has developed powerful and effective habits of the mind and soul
- Can work through challenges
- Committed to what he or she does
- Capacity to achieve goals and obtain self-fulfillment
- Possesses high standards and values
- Admired for courage and strength
- Models forgiveness
- Trustworthy
- Demonstrates humility
- Peaceful
- Wise
- Admits when they are wrong
- Genuine love
- Discernment - understands the whole situation

What Constitutes An Idol

- **Michael Phelps**, the man who captured eight incredible gold medals at the Beijing Olympics, can also smoke a bong.
- **Charles Barkley** stands in a dimly lit gym with a basketball squeezed between his beefy hands. He is only filming a commercial. Or is he? As he looks squarely into the

camera, he declares, **"I am not a role model...I am paid to wreak havoc on the basketball court."**

- **Karl Malone**, a member of the Utah Jazz in the National Basketball Association (NBA), once stated that, **"We [athletes] don't choose to be role models, we are chosen. Our only choice is to be a good role model or a bad one."**

Isn't that one of the words that Paul uses in I Thessalonians 1:4 as one of the evidences of living free, **"chosen?"** Hey, what if it is not the kids who has a great admiration for you, but what if it was a team owner? What if he said,

"Listen, I want you to be on my team but I want to get one thing straight, I chose you, you didn't chose me. If you get that wrong then all we will do is struggle over who is suppose to please who. I want to do you right, as a matter of fact, I would love nothing more than blessing your life, but it's got to be my way. You've got to understand that. You have got to know who is in charge...and it is not you. I chose you and with that great big salary I'm going to pay you, I expect you to play to the best of your ability, both on and off the court!"

Sadly enough, athletes are not choosing to be good role models. They are pretty much doing what many pro athlete's are doing, like **Dave Winfield**, a former major- league baseball player with such teams as the New York Yankees and the former California Angels. He believes that athletes should not be the primary role models in a child's life. And when you are saying "primary," who couldn't agree with that? But he goes on explaining that **if athletes themselves continue to declare themselves ineligible to be a role model, then why do people continually allow their children to admire these athletes for more than his/her sports abilities?** Oh, I know, no, let me guess, it's the parents fault, right? Let's blame them!

See, if I can make it someone else's responsibility then I can make it somebody else's fault. I shouldn't have to take responsibility for my life and how it could affect you...really?

What American Idol Do You Follow?

The eighth season of American Idol premiered on January 13, 2009 and concluded on May 20, 2009 where Kris Allen was announced the winner of the competition. He defeated runner-up Adam Lambert after nearly 100 million votes were cast from an estimated 28.8 million people watching the two-hour finale. The 100 million votes was the highest recorded vote total in the history of the show. I found it interesting that **Susan Boyle**- one of the top contender for England's version of American idol won over Kris Allen as the best talent. Susan's intro performance is amazingly surprising. It might do your heart good to see her for yourself at: http://talent.itv.com/videos/video/item_200081.htm

"I am the Lord God. You shall have no other idols before me."

Exodus 20:2,3

It may surprise you to learn that the most repeated commandment of all the Ten Commandments in the entire Bible that you are to have no other idols in your life. The word "idol" or "idolatry" appears over 220 times in the Bible. There is more denunciation of idolatry that any other sin you find in God's Word.

There are laws on the books today that are irrelevant. These are actual laws on the books:

- In Massachusetts, it is illegal to wear stilts while working on a construction site.

- In Detroit, it is illegal to tie an alligator to a fire-hydrant.
- In Maui County, Hawaii, children must be twelve years old to play on a busy highway.

For God, idolatry is public enemy #1. If God had a most wanted list idolaters would be at the top. The reason is simple. Everybody worships some kind of god. Everybody believes in some kind of deity. It may be nature, science, or the god of self, but everybody worships some god. That is why the Bible preaches against idolatry, not atheism.

Idolatry is a great enemy of the gospel. **Mark Driscoll** shares a story of visiting India. As he walked down a narrow path he saw idol after idol displayed around the villages and at the home of people. He came to one of the areas of sacrifice where there was blood and feathers all over the place from the sacrifices of chickens. He turns to a local pastor's wife who was planting a church in that area and asked, "Do you think you will visit America again soon?" Her response was, "No!"

Her response surprised him, so he asked why? She responded, "I can not stomach the idolatry!" Here he is standing next to an altar that sacrifices apparently to the chicken god and she can't stomach the idolatry?

Obviously, this is not what Mark expected to hear. So he asked, "Where are the shrines of idolatry in our culture?" She said, "Your God is your stomachs and you have restaurants everywhere. Your god is sports teams and you build multi-million dollar stadiums to house them. Your god is your television and all the chairs in your home are lined up so your family can gather around the altar and worship that god."

Mark had an "Aw ha" moment. Idolatry is what we often see in someone else's culture and in our culture we think it's just the Bass Pro Shop, the steak house, it's just the movie theatre. We see it as entertainment. We see it as a hobby. We see it as a sport. We don't see it as religion. We don't see it as spirituality. We don't see it as idolatry. Sometimes it is and often it is!

Here is something else you may not know. The commandment against idolatry is the only commandment where **God says that those who break it actually hate Him**. If you worship a false god, if you worship anything other than God you hate God according to this commandment.

Jesus Leaves Us No Choice

Jesus gives us eleven verses, what we call the Beatitudes, how the Christian believer is to respond to life's situations and others. Then He brings the Beatitudes home with illustrated statements of being a living example, a role model in this world,

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."

Matthew 5:13-15

"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:16

Thinking of Dave Winfield's statement again, you cannot declare yourself ineligible to be a role model as a Christian, and every child should get a chance to admire your character and strength. As a Christian, we are all high profile, it is an image that cast a shadow of some sort on those around them.

When you became a Christian you “became” something. What was that? What does that mean? Paul helps us out with these questions.

Here's Looking At You

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.”

I Thessalonians 1:6

Paul turns and changes the focus of conversation from the Thessalonians acceptance of the gospel to the external manifestation of the Word of God in verse 6. Because the word came with power, penetrating them through the work of the Holy Spirit that brought deep conviction, their new birth into God's family was a definite, observable change that became evident immediately in the Thessalonian's lives.

They instantly became different, imitators, of like heart and like mind. Paul uses *ginomai*, to *become*, not *eimi*, to *be*. There is a lot of fear to follow and imitate the preacher, there are a lot of people who have had their share of pain over this issue. But Paul includes “...and of the Lord...” because his whole intent of being imitated was as he himself imitated the Lord Jesus.

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

I Corinthians 11:1

Yes, people can easily and so readily imitate the preacher even when he does not imitate the Lord. This is a sad fact of the church today. A good leader does not have to be a Godly leader and many will forfeit a Godly leader to follow someone more skilled, but not so Godly. You should follow my Godly actions as your pastor, just as you should follow and learn healthy Christianity from others within the church. But beware of those who attempt to destroy the church and the leaders within in an attempt to create independence and divisiveness.

Skill Verses Character

I've had an incredible learning experience pastoring over the years. There have been times where I've had to battle with painful, incriminating attacks. And through the years I've taken different positions on the incoming bombardments. Over the last year I have learned something that has truly helped me and others deal with issues concerning differences of opinions, failure on my part and confronting personal attack on my character. Here is what I've discovered.

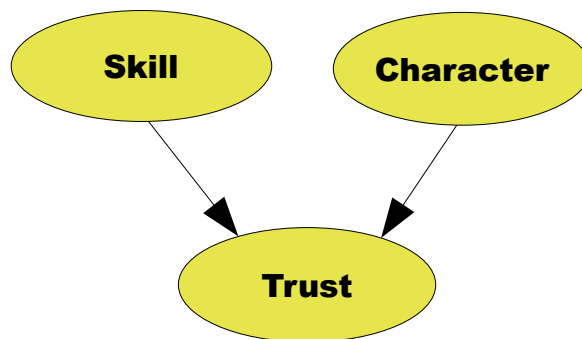
Skill and Character are two important issues that ministry is built upon. Both of them lead to “trust.” It's important to stop and grasp the understanding of trust, it is the bottom line in relationship, and a main reason why people will follow you. As we have seen in the past political world, some value one more than the other. Whatever you can do to improve the budget is more important than your private life, money is the bottom line in America, and if you can make that work you can do about anything you

want.

The same is not true in the Christian realm. Actually, character is or should be the key issue and skill comes in second. Many a church has opted out on hiring an excellent communicator, a crowd bringer over their weaker character traits. What they seem to continually fail to see is that the bigger you are, the bigger you fall. You are only setting a guy up to expose his weaknesses on a greater scale.

Trust is an incredible challenge when dealing with people because many who are unhealthy have no clue how to resolve misunderstandings, differences of opinions, change of direction or gossip. (The list could go on but you get the picture.) On most occasions, when an unhealthy person makes a judgement call, it is often an attack on someones character. They never take into consideration all the contributing factors of that persons alleged disappointments. I say alleged simply because an unhealthy person will accept the negative about someone before they can believe the positive about them, even when they know it's a lie.

If I were to draw it out for you it would look something like this,



In my earlier years, when I've been personally attacked, I would question what was wrong with my character since that is the area I was attacked. I spent many hours praying for forgiveness for that sin that must be in me...that was until I learned that there were people who loved to discourage and belittle others. They were the church bullies and I've got a pretty good radar for who they are now.

Anyways, one day it dawned on me that some of the accusations were right, but how they let me know was wrong. They attacked my character, and I let them. Eventually I realized that allowing people to attack my character when it was actually a skill issue problem, I was allowing them to be in sin. See, they were attacking the core reason for anyone to have faith in me as a pastor or leader. They were attacking the core of "trust." What I've learned is that when a person unfairly attacks my character, they are in sin. Yes, sin! Why? Because it is not only my character being torn down, but it tears down the only point that a whole church would want to gather and follow this particular leader. If you tear trust down, the church will go down.

I've seen people who specializes in destructive accusations, only to serve and satisfy their own insecurities and selfish pride. I've see beautiful churches sitting vacant because of the constant badgering of unhealthy people who are not happy until everyone around them is exposed as unfit and ungodly. This sin is evil and it is prevalent in churches today. It is best that some people don't come to our church, their

stealth behavior is constantly being prayed for so it can be exposed for what it is.

But it is not always the attackers fault that causes divisiveness and frustration. Many leaders have left their dead in the wake of their ministries. I can't tell you how many people I have come in contact with who will never enter a church or won't allow themselves to be used of God because of the misuse of the leadership role. We will be charged with a greater charge for all of our acts in leadership. You can never blame any leader for your failure to follow Christ, but at times I can't blame a person for having difficulty with it.

Super Hero Action Figure Or Examples, Mentors, Influencers and Leaders

Very seldom, in all my years of ministry has anyone jumped into leadership in the church without some hesitation. I'm convinced that all but few never considered the horrendous blunders of bad leadership. Their hesitation was in response to the great responsibility of working for God. In the confusion of the leadership void in our homes and nation, there is the same void in our churches and the Kingdom of God over all. I am meeting more and more young pastors who are trying very hard to be funny and liked rather than to convincingly be leading.

I've struggled with with the role I should play as a pastor, reviewing all the disappointing and influencing pastors of my life. Praise God for the Bible, it gives us a display, a role model to follow when we can't find it in our home, city or church. So what am I to be? Super hero action figure or an example, mentor and leader? If this is too hard to answer then you have some problems deeper than the one I am discussing here!

I love the power of God. I believe in it, and I claim that it is as relevant for us today as it was the day it happened. But I will not allow anyone to make me their Biblical super action figure. I can't, because I can't live up to it, I can't live under the pressure of it and I just don't have those wonderful miracles following me around. Am I resistant to that? Noway! I have prayed for years for the power to preach with signs following. But today I am just praying for the word of God to come with power and that the Holy Spirit would activate the hearts of the hearers with deep conviction. That's what I want today!

I am approached many times by "spiritual" people who want me to lead their expectation of what the church should look like. They like it when I get fired up, the spirit moves and we get all "Kom-by-ya." I like that too. I know that's my flavor and it is many people's flavor as well. But it's not all about me. I will not be your Super Hero Action Figure because basically I am only doing what I hear my Father saying. And you don't know how many years it took for me to get to this point. There are so many people I have admired through out the years in ministry, but all that God has called me to be is "obedient!"

Elder/Pastor

In our church I am considered the pastor and an elder. Basically I am the teaching or preaching elder with the office of a pastor. My responsibility is to shepard the flock of Christ, protect them from the wolves, nurture them into reproduction and feed them in green pastures. My role is clearly stated in the Bible and is expected to be respected

by both those I serve and me who serves in it. The role of a pastor comes with it a greater demand than those who attend it will ever expect. It cannot be done without the help of the Holy Spirit. There are many who are just doing their time, waiting for retirement. God help us all.

Follow Me

Paul did not hesitate to tell people around him to follow him. There is a false assumption in leadership, if you lead, people will follow. But the truth is, if you ask them to follow, people will follow. Even Jesus knew that! Look at Him. He had all kinds of wondrous signs, taught like nobodies business and could make cool things out of wood, but He resorted to calling people to follow Him.

I feel the pressure when I read Paul's writings. I see a leader way out there, taking the plunge. He is all in. But because of that, so were all the people. If he was committed 100% to leading then they would be 100% to following, and they did.

The point back in I Thessalonians 1:6 is the tense of the word "*became*." It is a "momentary tense," it describes an event as a single whole, without regarding the time taken in its accomplishment. The present and imperfect are "continuous" tenses, i.e., they contemplate action as in progress, noting "the time taken in accomplishment" (J. H. Moulton, Grammar of New Testament Greek, Proleg. pp. 187, 190).

Who Do You Look Like?

Paul's statement,

"You became imitators of us and of the Lord..."
I Thessalonians 1:6

"*Became*" meant that they instantly **became an imitator, not just a fan!** Facebook has made becoming a fan way too accessible. Imitators (3402) (*mimetes*) means one who follows or mimes someone else. *Mimetes* basically means to copy or imitate someone's behavior and has many related words in English - "mime" (one who acts out an imitation of another person or animal), "pantomime" (a theater production which originally was without words), "mimeograph" (a machine which makes many copies from one stencil).

Paul was telling the Thessalonians that you look like us, I see a little of me, a little of Silas and a little of Timothy, but you really look like what I think God looks like.

Imitating Others Is...

1. Imitate The Best In Others And Of God

"You became imitators of us and of the Lord..."
I Thessalonians 1:6a

- 1. Do you know who you are?** If someone were to imitate you, what do you think they would look like? Do you know the qualities that you have to offer others that might help them in their relationships, understanding of God's Word, handle their business? Who are you? Do you know that your uniqueness is a blessing to someone else when it is turned as a tool. You have something to offer,

something to teach me so I can be better equipped. You and I are born limited and unique. I have everything you need and little of all I need. Isn't that a strange truth? You can only be an imitator of me if I have defined me to the point that you can replicate it. Stop fearing that, start finding that! Become the best person you can possibly become. If you get depressed, learn how to become encouraged. If you are financially weak, learn how to take steps to control your money, save and get out of debt. If you can't seem to get ahead a work and get a better paying job, find out what you need to do to move to the next level. Stop complaining, stop blaming everyone for where you are at and start taking steps to change your world.

2. **Do you know how you look best like God?** I notice in my children...or not so children any more, the aspects of my wife in them. She has duplicated herself in them in a unique way. They don't pretend to act like her, but I can see natural ways of her coming out in them. She is a mother and loves it. She is nurturing and consumed with their well being. They are turning out as all the good in Carol. From me they just got their looks. Ha! But what I have from God that looks like God I utilize. I become what He has made me. I act on my "gift of ME." I find a place to utilize it to glorify him, not try to fill a deep void in who I am. I know who I am best when I am serving in who God made me to be. This is not about behaving, it is about being real, not real like the world. They believe being real us to be rude, blasphemy, and critical. That's not being real, that's being out of control. To be real is not to "express yourself" in uncontrollable attacks for verbal tantrums, but it is preferring His Words and His ways over our own. **I am more real denying myself than you can ever be expressing yourself!** Wow, big statement.

I believe people will respond to you like you responded to Him. If you are fearful, reluctant and resentful, that is exactly what you will find, but if you repent of that, repent of your rebellion and your resistance of the drawing of the Holy Spirit, I believe that people will be drawn toward Christ through you.

2. **Imitate In Times Of Suffering**

...in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

I Thessalonians 1:6b

I see amazement in Paul's words here. He is not saying, "Oh you guys were having such a bad time, this is probably not a good time to share Christ." He was saying, "You were facing some of the most difficult times I have ever seen and I've got a great solution for you." Now this is coming from the guy who has a history of suffering,

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

II Corinthians 11:23-24

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the

move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers."

II Corinthians 11:25-26

"I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"

II Corinthians 11:27-29

Get perspective here. Paul is looking at the Thessalonians and saying, I am encouraged and amazed at the severe suffering you have been through and you accept, welcomed, embraced, took whole heartedly this message with incredible joy! That's a lot coming from a man who probably went through more than the whole of the Thessalonian church. It's important to go through things, suffering is not absent from great people. They don't have it made, they have it in spite of the conflict!

Suffering/Tribulation (2347) (*thlipsis* from *thlibo* = **to crush**, press, compress or squeeze, in turn from *thlao* = to break > Latin "*tribulum*" = farming instrument to thresh grain, separating wheat from chaff!) carries the idea of being squeezed or placed under pressure and thus refers to intense pressure, hard circumstances, suffering or trouble that inflicts anguish, distress, oppression and affliction.

It refers not to mild discomfort but to great difficulty (and notice that it is modified by "much or severe"!) In Scripture *thlipsis* is perhaps most often used of outward difficulties, but it is also used of emotional stress. Nothing proves your commitment to Christ quite like someone else who has had a more difficult time than yourself and finding God's grace all that it was meant to be.

In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, he commends them "*for (their) perseverance and faith in the midst of all (their) persecutions and afflictions (thlipsis) which (they) endured.*" (2Thes 1:4)

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may (continually) have peace. In the world you (continually) have tribulation (thlipsis), but take courage (be undaunted, of good cheer); I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

Nothing can be more distracting than severe suffering. But God's peace is a powerful thing. When we grasp that Jesus is talking to US so that WE can have JOY. This joy can only be found through the work of the Holy Spirit. There is a work in a Christian that doesn't come through positive thinking, but from Spirit birthed thoughts. When it comes, it comes with it an overwhelming assurance of God's ability to either change the situation or help you through it. The revelation that these Thessalonians experienced is that God was more, far more than they expected. They were looking for relief when He gave them a deeper quality of life.

The depth of a disciple's joy in the Lord may well be measured by the degree of his participation in the sufferings of the Lord. It is still true that those who pay a great price in suffering to remain true to Christ know a deep measure of this Spirit-wrought joy in

their lives. Perhaps our Christian lives are so lacking in this joy because our Christian profession costs us so little." (Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians)

3. **Imitate So You Can Be Imitated**

"And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere..."

1 Thessalonians 1:7-8b

Does it sound like I'm repeating myself? That's the point, I am. Look at what Paul has to say here. There is something more important than being known, it is what you are being known for. **If you are mighty in God, why do you think it will not draw attention. Satan has robbed so many Christians from the privileged of being a well known example of someone to follow.** We cannot continue to be attracted by the media that we live in shadows and caves. We cannot be obnoxious but we cannot be silent either. You and I were made to serve God with all our heart, that will have a manifestation somehow. If you live for Satan don't you think that draws attention? Certainly, you don't have to be radical, just be like Christ and it will rival the spirits of the air. Be like Christ where you are and you will find that there is an attraction that you will have to learn to deal with. That is another thing that Christians have difficulty dealing with, "success." There only example is often the world, so when they become successful they live like those who have some of it.

Dealing with attention and controversy and recognition. Oh, what a challenge, but who knows what you might be able to do if you would stop being afraid of being noticed and let God place you in appropriate areas. I do believe that He wants to place us into specific positions, but often we sabotage it because we are not comfortable being in those strategic places. When we realize that we never really arrive, we only serve at different levels. Too often our loving passion with God grows stagnant because we are unwilling to move from one familiar area to one that is not so familiar.

They Modeled After Paul- Achaia was originally the name for a relatively small amount of territory in southern Greece, just to the north of the Peloponnesus. By New Testament times, the occupying Romans applied the name to all of the Peloponnesus, plus the rest of the southern half of Greece, with Macedonia making up the northern half. Achaia was designated as a Roman senatorial province, whose governors were known as "proconsuls" (e.g. Gallio), while governors of Roman imperial provinces were known as "procurators" (e.g. Pontius Pilate in Judea). The major cities of Achaia were Corinth, Athens and Sparta.



Three Things The Thessalonians Were Known For:

"Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he

raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

I Thessalonians 1:8c-10

1. **They were known for how they treated Paul and his companions.** Now let's think about this. If I was known to have hosted someone famous, that would be the word of the town. I've heard that Randy Travis stays with a friend in Garden City and hunts Pheasants. Now, even though I am not a country western fan, that would still be a privilege to host him or even know the guy who hosts him. He is well known and in my estimation, has a great testimony for Christ that has developed over the years.

This is not the idea here. The Thessalonians were not known for “*hosting*” Paul. They were known for how they “*treated*” Paul.

...they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.

I Thessalonians 1:9a

It was their interest to brag on how the Thessalonians treated Paul. The **emphasis was on the treatment of Paul and not on Paul**. Now that would be a twist because I know that Paul was often the item in many communities. He was the superstar! But these Thessalonians treated Paul and friends with such due respect that it set precedence and became well known. How were they treated?

- **I think it must have challenged their cultural customs.** Paul and his friends were not treated weird, but exceptionally well. I remember in Africa Pastor Aaron would take his furniture out of his house and bring it into the church so I could sit in the big red valuer chair. I had difficulty with it and attempted to downplay the moment. But God dealt with this in my heart. The problem was not them overestimating my position, it was I who was uncomfortable in accepting what my position called for.

There are terrorists in our land. They haven't come from another country but from within to annihilate the role as a father and even a man. These terrorist attempts to lessen men to unredeemable failure and at best, a little less than an animal.

Another terrorist is the attack of an antichrist spirit that attempts to dissolve any validity of a minister's role. Most young men today who feel a call of God on their life are almost apologetic in nature and look for a soft place to serve so it won't cause any offense. It's a trap and a lie. Don't let God be desecrated in your life. Learn to serve. Learn to respect the role. Learn to lead. Not only did it challenge their cultural customs, it challenges ours.

- **I think it must have taught them what a real reception was.** Now it will be hard to make a distinction separate of what I have already stated, but I'll attempt it here. Whatever the Thessalonians did, it stuck in the minds of the people all over Greece, Turkey and Macedonia.

The “reception” the Thessalonians gave Paul set a precedence of how to treat ministry with respect and awe. Also, this area of Greece was so dominated by Rome and the Roman Empire and the Thessalonians knew what they should do and better do when a Roman official came through, you had better respect him

in every form possible.

Why I believe that the Thessalonians were so noted by Paul in this matter was because no one ever got that respect without fear or force, yet they gave it to him, Silas and Timothy freely. There was really no true respect among the Romans, only the formalities of it. When Paul came on the scene, the Thessalonians give Paul and friends the same kind of respect freely that the Romans demanded legally. I think that they were surprised that there was a non-threatened respect that others were worthy to receive.

- **I think that they were impressed with a real giving heart.** It was obvious to Paul that they were in severe suffering, but this was not obvious only to Paul, but to the whole region. The way they treated Paul and his companions went beyond their own capacity. They gave more than what they could personally partake of. **It amazed the people.**

When you look at regional giving rates you will find that they vary widely across the country. New Englanders, long derided for their stinginess, give an average of only 1.3% of their annual pretax income to charity. However, almost 82% of New England households participate in charitable giving. By contrast, only 65% of the residents of the Southeast and Gulf Coast states give to charity each year. But they give an average 2.2% of their income when they do.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' latest survey of consumer expenditure found that the **poorest fifth of America's households contributed an average of 4.3 percent of their incomes to charitable organizations in 2007. The richest fifth gave at less than half that rate, 2.1 percent.**

My friend, Joel Watson, a missionary who was holding a crusade in Africa. The president of a Christian University here in the USA, was preaching at a crusade for him in Africa and shared with the people there the need that his University would more than likely have to close its doors for the lack of funds. At the end of that service an African pastor felt compelled to take up an offering for the school president.

It was obvious that nothing these Africans could give was going to be able to make any difference, their offering of chickens and a few coins only frustrated my missionary friend knowing that they were giving to a college that had it's challenges with liberal ideas and a seemingly "wondering" from the truth. Toward the end of the offering, a little girl came to the front and offered her shoes to the University President. Talk about humbling, it felt shameful to accept such a gift, it was certainly her highest prized possessions and the only shoes she had.

So humbled, the president took the shoes back with him to America. He took them to meetings with him as he asked for people to give in faith like this little girl did. Because of those little shoes, the college caught up on a few million dollar debt and was back on track financially. This is the kind of giving I believe these Thessalonians had. Not kindly hospitable, but horrifically humbling in their giving, an indebtedness that you could not repay in a life time.

Of all of Paul's encounters, there was only one other group of people who got so widely respected and recognize, Acts 17:11:

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

Acts 17:11

Three Things The Thessalonians Were Known For:

First, They were known for how they treated Paul and his companions.

2. They were known for how they turned from idols.

Here's what Paul said about them,

“...They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...”

I Thessalonians 1:9c

It was no mystery that something so supernatural, so revealing happened in their hearts. This gospel brought an outrageous hope and peace that it was worth giving up everything they and their ancestors had believed in and surrendered to. The Thessalonians testimonies of what God had come to mean to them became so loud, so convincing that these people from the whole region of Achaia and Macedonia had already been so convincing in what happened to them Paul only had to simply share, the seed had already been planted. I believe that we all need a new and fresh baptism of what it means to encounter God. The personal testimony of one changed life does an amazing amount of convincing than ten sermons, and the Thessalonians proved it.

Too many people misinterpret their testimony, they explain their history, but what changes hearts is what God does on the inside that drew us near to God. Like the man who was healed in the temple, “I once was blind, but now I see.”

- Do you remember how lost and hopeless you were before God's grace opened His favor of love on you?
- Do you remember the shocking deceit that filled your mind until the loving kindness of God breath His truth in your heart?
- Do you remember what it was like to be filled with fear, anger, confusion and bondage until the power of God invaded your body and forever changed you?
- Do you remember what it was like to be so intoxicated by your own selfish pride that you remained blind, in a downward stupor only to find that your confidence was cradled in arms that were condemned for eternity...that is until His love broke through?
- Do you remember? Do you? Do we get so busy counting our blessings that we forget that our new life in Him *is* the blessing? Oh God, I am so blessed, just to know you, just to have you look my way. I am so ashamed that I have stayed silent of this. That I have been blatant and bratty toward you. Oh forgive my self centered consumption and let me proclaim the mysteries of my God. Forgive me God that the mention of your name said in jesting doesn't smite my heart in fear and shame or

said in praise doesn't jolt immediate, exuberant worship. Forever remind me of what you have done for me. Remind me of how magnificently incomplete by very best is and how incredibly powerful one simple drop of your blood is. Remind me dear Lord that You have chosen me, you wanted me, you picked me. I am forever grateful. I am astounded and deeply moved. My knees are too high for you. My loudest praise too silent. You deserve all of me. Not a portion or a dedicated bit, all, the whole, me, just as you provided on my behalf.

They turned to God from idols, not from idols to God. It wasn't that they had become fed up with their idols and then decided to give God a chance. No, they turned to God and found Him so satisfying that they dropped their idols. Let us never lose the sense of thrill and awe that is implicit in this account. Two men go into a heathen city with the word of the Lord. They preach the gospel in the power of the Spirit. The miracle of regeneration takes place: men and women become so enraptured with the Savior that they abandon their idols. Next you have a local assembly of believers praising God, living lives of holiness, bravely enduring persecution, and winning others to Christ. Truly the Lord's service is the prince of callings! (MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

Three Things The Thessalonians Were Known For

First, They were known for how they treated Paul and his companions.

Second, They were known for how their lives were changed.

3. They were known for how they anticipated Christ's return.

**"...They tell how to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—
Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."**

1 Thessalonians 1:10

Wait (362) (*anemeno* from *ana* = upon, it intensifies meaning of *meno* + *meno* = abide, remain) conveys the meaning of **expectant waiting**—sustained, patient, trusting waiting. It pictures an eager looking forward to the coming of one whose arrival was anticipated at any time, waiting for one whose coming is expected.

This anticipation of Christ's return characterized the Christian church from its very beginning. Acts makes it clear that it was an essential part of the preaching of the gospel. That Paul laid considerable emphasis upon this hope in his preaching at Thessalonica seems clear from the perverted charge against the Christians in Acts 17:7 when read in the light of the Thessalonian epistles. This eschatological hope is the keynote of these epistles. It had taken a firm hold on the Thessalonian believers. If their serving a living and true God distinguished them from the Gentiles, this expectant hope for Christ's return distinguished them from the Jews. (Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians: BMH Book. 1996)

There is a coming wrath. *Rhuomai* is in the present tense indicating that our Savior is continually delivering us. The tense is **not past**, "**Who delivered us**," namely, by his death (which He did do); **nor future**, "**Who shall deliver us**," (which He will do), but **present**, "**Who delivers us**" the deliverance is ongoing (we are daily delivered from the power of sin, the lure of the world and the temptation of the devil by our Strong

Deliverer!) — **it commenced with His death, burial and resurrection, and will be consummated at His return!** The middle voice is reflexive ("He Himself rescues us") and emphasizes His personal involvement in the rescue. He initiates the and participates in the carrying out of the rescue.

The wrath (3709) (*orge* from *orgao* = to teem, swell) is literally rendered "the unique and specific wrath which is coming". This is not a reference to hell but to a time of "hell on earth" so to speak, to "the specific" (definite article "the" precedes "orge" indicating it is not just wrath in general but is a specific wrath) coming period of wrath on earth, which almost certainly refers to the prophetically significant time period known as the Day of the Lord which would include the time period Jesus referred to as "The Great Tribulation" (Mt 24:21) that occurs in the last half of Daniel's Seventieth Week.

Coming (2064) (*erchomai*) is in the present tense which indicates that this wrath is an absolute certainty, a certain future event which is continually coming or continually on its way. It is a horrible time from which the afflicted saints at Thessalonica could also be assured of deliverance by their Lord. And so **for believers, Jesus' Second Coming is their great hope, but for others it will be their eternal loss.** Believers will experience the persecution and pressure of Jews and pagans now, while their persecutors will be recompensed with wrath of God in time and eternity.

Jonathan Edwards (in his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") writes that,

"The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose. It is true, that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the mean time is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are constantly rising, and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, that holds the waters back, that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw his hand from the flood-gate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God, would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power..."

It's been said that there are no atheists in foxholes. But you won't find them in hell either. The fact of God's wrath against sin is declared in both the Old and New Testaments. His wrath against sin arises out of the holiness of His nature. In the words of Rienecker, **God would completely dissolve and deny himself as God if he would not prove himself as a "real and terrible wrath" against the sinning man. God cannot and will not favor sin. Therefore his wrath burns against everyone who opposes him. The wrath of God is not an illusion, but a reality...**

The manifestation of divine wrath is perfectly compatible with God's love. Anger had its proper place in the perfect human character of Christ (Mark 3:5)." God must be angry with sin because of the destructive character of sin. **His love will not allow Him to be tolerant toward the devastating effects of sin.** Hughes aptly remarks, "For God to have permitted sin to flourish unchecked and unpunished, and passively to have

watched the world degenerate into a dung heap of corruption and violence, would have been very far removed from an expression of love, apart from the fact that it would have argued the impotence of His purposes in creation and the incompetence of His hand to control the affairs of men, which would mean in turn that He was not God at all. (Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians: BMH Book. 1996)