

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

STUDY ONE

A Church with the Right Stuff

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

There's a fine line between healthy admiration and unhealthy exaltation. It's one thing to look upon a person or a place with real respect and delight, but it's another thing to exaggerate in your mind just how great that person or place might be. However, the Thessalonians really were like that. Their place was magnetic.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CHURCHES dot the landscape in almost every culture in the world, but not all are alike. Beyond a common faith in Jesus as Savior, differences abound. Doctrinal perspective, preaching style, worship and music preference, leadership structure, level of evangelistic zeal, budget size—the distinctives seem endless.

With such variety, it's easy to go to extremes and either unfairly criticize or boastfully exalt certain churches. Many differences arise as an extension of our personalities, our positions, and our preferences. Is there an ideal church, though? One that checks all the boxes?

Some lift up the early church as the purest form of Christianity. *If only our churches could be like them*, we think. But the New Testament's portrait of early church life is hardly idyllic.

Galatians, considered by many scholars to be Paul's earliest letter, addressed a church rife with false teachers. The wayward church at Corinth contended with sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, factions, misuse of the Lord's Supper, and confusion surrounding the gifts of the Holy Spirit. When John penned the book of the Revelation, Jesus (through John) rebuked churches over their compromise and spiritual complacency.

Is there hope for the church? Is there a model for us to follow?



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

A Church with the Right Stuff

1 *Thessalonians* 1:1–10

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we consider the church at Thessalonica. While it wasn't perfect and while it had endured great hardship, it was indeed a church that had the “right stuff.” One that struck a healthy balance between extremes and that demonstrated the qualities that make Christianity contagious in any culture.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

A church with the right stuff is a church whose people jointly embrace God's heart for the body of Christ, uphold faithful obedience to the Scriptures, and pray biblically. The apostle Paul provides us with an effective prayer in [Colossians 1:9–12](#) to orient our hearts as we approach the book of 1 Thessalonians.

Read and reflect on Paul's prayer, and then add your prayer in the space provided below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Traveling with Silas, Paul arrived in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. Although his stay was only three to five weeks, he managed to plant a church and equip its believers with the basics of sound doctrine.

As the gospel drew both Jews and Greeks to faith in Christ, some Jews became jealous of Paul and stirred up troublemakers to start a riot. Unable to put their hands on Paul and Silas, the mob dragged Jason and some other new believers before the city council, accusing them of treason against Caesar—“for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus” (Acts 17:7).

This frightening episode forced Paul and Silas to flee the city by night and move on to Berea. To familiarize yourself with this background, read the account in [Acts 17:1–10](#).

Situated on the *Via Egnatia*, Thessalonica was a vital commercial thoroughfare connecting Rome in the west with the eastern colonies. A thriving church here would open the rest of Europe to Christianity. View a map of the *Via Egnatia* in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, [Insights on 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#), page 104.¹

A Church with the Right Stuff

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Take some time to read the full letter of *1 Thessalonians*, keeping in mind the importance of Paul’s brief time with these people. Feel free to reference Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s chart to guide you as you move through the letter.

1 THESSALONIANS OVERVIEW BIBLE CHART

	THE PASTOR’S HEART			THE PASTOR’S BURDEN	
	1 Thessalonians 1	1 Thessalonians 2	1 Thessalonians 3	1 Thessalonians 4	1 Thessalonians 5
	Thanksgiving Remembering Affirming Reporting	The pastor among the flock The flock’s response to the pastor	Personal concern Comfort and relief	Living holy lives Prophetic hope	Stay alert! Encourage each other! Live in peace!
PERSPECTIVE	Looking back			Looking ahead	
SUBJECT	The church itself	The apostle himself	The report	The concern	The balance
ESPECIALLY APPROPRIATE FOR . . .	New converts	Young pastors	Suffering Christians	Tempted and uninformed Christians	“Sleepy” Christians
THEME	The hope of Christ’s return comforts us and motivates us to godly living.				
KEY VERSES	1 Thessalonians 1:8–10; 4:1, 13–18				
CHRIST IN 1 THESSALONIANS	Jesus is our source of hope and comfort, the One who rescues believers from the coming wrath (<i>1 Thes. 1:10; 4:13–5:11</i>).				

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Chart taken from *The Swindoll Study Bible*. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.



Observation: Thanksgiving for the Thessalonian Church

In the observation phase, simply note what the verses say, paying attention to action words, descriptions, contrasts, and any phrases that stand out to you. Careful observation lays the groundwork for accurate interpretation.²

Thanksgiving—1 Thessalonians 1:1–2

Concerned about the fledging believers, Paul “could bear it no longer” and “sent Timothy to find out whether [their] faith was still strong” (1 Thessalonians 3:5). He included Timothy in his opening line: “This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy” (1:1), indicating that he had returned with his report.

A Church with the Right Stuff

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Paul wrote “to the church in Thessalonica” (1 Thessalonians 1:1)—but he could have written to your church as well, because you also “belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). The Thessalonian believers welcomed Paul’s teaching with eager hearts. Whether in the first-century church or in the twenty-first-century church, where is our spiritual authority vested? Why is it essential for churches to place themselves under this authority?

According to *1 Thessalonians 1:2*, what two spiritual disciplines did Paul, Silas, and Timothy continually practice on behalf of the Thessalonian church? How are these practices linked?

Remembering—1 Thessalonians 1:3–5

Paul was not vague about the reasons he was thankful. What virtues did the Thessalonian believers have that were like a bouquet of encouragement for Paul (*1 Thessalonians 1:3–5*, particularly 1:3)?

Paul commended those early Christians for their “perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3 NASB). *Because* of their hope, they persevered. *Hope* here refers to the Lord’s return. How did hope fuel their perseverance?

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1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Paul, Silas, and Timothy didn't just talk a good talk. According to 1 Thessalonians 1:5, what convinced the Thessalonians their words were true? How did they evidence a life-on-life, "gospel with skin on," approach? Why was that model important for the Thessalonians?

Affirming—1 Thessalonians 1:6–8

The apostle moved from remembering the Thessalonians to affirming them. In *1 Thessalonians 1:6–8*, Paul's affirmation of the Thessalonians was two-fold. First, according to 1:6–7, how did they receive the gospel? Their responsiveness became a model for whom? How far did their example reach?

Second, according to 1:8, who else heard of the Thessalonians' faith? What did Paul, Silas, and Timothy joyfully discover?

Reporting—1 Thessalonians 1:9–10

Wherever Paul traveled, the Thessalonians' reputation went ahead of him! According to *1 Thessalonians 1:9*, what good words was Paul hearing?

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1 *Thessalonians* 1:1–10

Previously, Paul mentioned being thankful for their “enduring hope” (1 *Thessalonians* 1:3). What was the object of their hope, according to *1 Thessalonians* 1:10?

What a mutually and spiritually encouraging relationship Paul enjoyed with the Thessalonian church—and in such a brief visit!

The Thessalonians knew Paul as REAL, warts and all, cracks and all, struggle and all. No wonder there was such a kinship. No wonder he prayed for these people. He had delivered his life to them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: A Three-Legged Stool

Let’s build on our observations to understand what the passage means. While their earthly address was Thessalonica, their true home was in heaven, for they belonged to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 *Thessalonians* 1:3). What does that phrase indicate about the security of the Thessalonians’ position? How was it a double-lock security? What encouragement does it offer believers today?

Faith, love, and hope form the bedrock of Paul’s teaching on the Christian life. Paul emphasized these virtues when he affirmed the Thessalonians’ “faithful work,” “loving deeds,” and “enduring hope” (1:3). How do Paul’s comments in *1 Thessalonians* 1:9–10 illustrate these principles in action?

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1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

How does 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 serve as a model for the experience of Christians today? What is significant about the ordering of these virtues?

The longer you walk with Christ, the less idols you lean on and need. You outgrow them. Idol by idol, piece by piece, you turn to God from them. Isn't it interesting, the order? You turn to Him from them to serve the living and true God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Faith, Love, and Hope

Scripture frequently addresses the foundational virtues of faith, love, and hope. They interlock and overlap in such a manner as to define much of the Christian experience. Consider the three passages below and, for each passage, record *the nature of the relationship dynamic* among the three virtues.

Romans 5:1–5

1 Corinthians 13:1–3, 13

1 Thessalonians 5:8–11

A Church with the Right Stuff

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Reflecting on these three passages, which virtue seems strongest in your life right now? Which virtue needs shoring up?

What I see here is both responsibility and readiness. I see a group of people who were responsible to take the truth to the lost and to live the truth among the saved. I see a readiness in the people who were saying, “He could come today, but He may not come in our lifetime.” That’s balance. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: A Christian with the Right Stuff

The light of the Thessalonian church flashes three commitments to guide us today.

First, *Christians and churches with the right stuff demonstrate commitment to the saved.* This means a readiness to accept and to support one another in the family of God.

Second, *Christians and churches with the right stuff demonstrate commitment to the lost.* This means being available for and involved with those without Christ by carrying the gospel with our lips and our lives.

Third, *Christians and churches with the right stuff demonstrate commitment to Christ.* This means maintaining freedom from entanglements or idols that distract from Christ and from living each day as though it could be our last.

How is the Holy Spirit prompting you to respond to this study today? Which of these commitments do you especially want to focus on, and why?

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1 *Thessalonians* 1:1–10

Which aspect of Paul’s experience with the Thessalonian church—thanksgiving, remembering, affirming, reporting—most encourages you? Why?

Express your faith in Christ, love for Christ, and hope in Christ in a closing heartfelt prayer.

The same faith, love, and hope that kept our ancient Christian brothers and sisters afloat in their storms can buoy us today. Regardless of your circumstances, keep acting by faith, showing God’s love, and yearning for Christ’s return. These qualities form the essence of Christianity in any age and in every culture in the world.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may there be a balance in my work of faith. May it be marked by grace, may it be a labor of love, may there be a steadfastness of hope. Whether dealing with young or old, may my heart and my mind be on You. I commit to You this marvelous study of this first-century letter which is written to us indirectly. I ask for You to give me listening ears, ready to change, ready to apply, for Jesus’ sake I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. You can purchase a copy of Swindoll’s *Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* at insight.org/store.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)”

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 1984, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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