

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
Presbyterian Church

“THE GOSPEL-SHAPED CHURCH PART 2”

For individual study or group discussion

DATE: August 10, 2025

SPEAKER: Wil/Chad

SERIES: 1 Thessalonians

PASSAGE: 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul suggests that suffering is not only part of the journey for individual believers but also for entire churches. While suffering is a reality in a broken and fallen world, it is neither random nor beyond God’s control. God allows suffering for a purpose. When the Gospel-shaped church remains steadfast in the face of trials, following the example of Christ and the apostles, it becomes a powerful witness and a model of faithfulness to others as outlined in today’s passage, 1 Thessalonians 1:5b-10.

The Gospel-shaped church receives the Gospel joyfully. (vv. 5b-6)

In these verses, Paul encourages the Thessalonians for their witness. Modeling Paul and the other apostles, the church at Thessalonica receives the Word “with the joy of the Holy Spirit” under great affliction. As one commentator points out, “Affliction has always been the lot of the true disciple of Christ, as [Christ] himself foretold in John 16:33. Luther asked reasonably, ‘If Christ wore a crown of thorns, why should his followers expect only a crown of roses?’”¹

- How does the Thessalonians’ witness of faithful endurance compare with the examples found in Acts 16:25 and 1 Peter 4:12-14? What does this teach us about the role of the Holy Spirit in sustaining joy and witness during times of affliction?
- Read Ephesians 2:8 and Philippians 1:29. In these passages, Paul explains that suffering, like faith, is a gift. How is it possible to view suffering in this light? (See also Hebrews 12:2)

The Gospel-shaped church spreads the Gospel contagiously (vv. 7-8)

According to 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, the spiritual children of the Thessalonian church give generously despite experiencing severe suffering and poverty. In this passage, Paul commends the Macedonian churches, who joyfully give beyond their ability. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 describes the emanation of the Spirit-filled generosity and joyful witness of the Thessalonian church. Their example becomes a contagious testimony inspiring believers to live faithfully in other regions of the world.

- NT scholar Greg Beale states that “Our lives have a purpose oriented beyond ourselves, beyond our holiness and well-being. We are to become ‘molds’ for others who are not Christians or who are younger Christians than we are. The essence of discipleship is imitation.”² Read Deuteronomy 4:5-8 and Matthew 5:16. How do these passages emphasize the role of visible obedience and godly living as a witness to the world?
- In what ways might your life reflect God’s character in a way that draws others to him?

The Gospel-shaped church lives the Gospel consistently (vv. 9-10)

The Thessalonian church’s reputation is so inspiring that it spreads throughout Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond. Their transformation from idol worshipers to devoted followers of the true God becomes a powerful testimony and example for others. As believers, we should strive to live holy lives that reflect Christ, not just in word but in deed (James 1:22). Our goal is to live the Gospel consistently, testifying to the reality of a changed life through repentance from sin, service for others, and patience as we await the return of Christ.

- Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3. What are the threefold characteristics of Christian living described in verse 3? How does Paul further expand upon these characteristics in verses 9-10?
- Read James 1:22 and Colossians 3:17. What might it look like for your own life to reflect these same characteristics of the Thessalonians—not only in words, but through daily action, and joyful expectation?

Family Dinner Table

Don’t Waste Your Wait:

Review of *Waiting Isn’t a Waste* by Mark Vroegop by Brian Gross, excerpted from TGC

One of the key characteristics of the Thessalonian church was their patient faithfulness amidst persecution as they waited for the return of Christ (1 Th. 1:10). In a review of Mark Vroegop’s book, *Waiting Isn’t a Waste*, Brian Gross summarizes that “*Waiting for something visible is difficult for most of us. Waiting for what we can’t see is often worse. [In the book], Vroegop explains how to redeem our inevitable waiting periods. Covering some of the same territory as Kelly Kapic’s book You’re Only Human, he reminds us we’re finite creatures designed with limitations. We can’t speed up time or see the future. We have to depend on a good God in our ‘gap moments.’ Vroegop writes, ‘Waiting on God is living on what I know to be true about God, when I don’t know what’s true about my life.’ This requires a perspective shift. Waiting isn’t a burden; it’s a spiritual practice ordained by God for our good and his glory. It teaches us to depend on God every moment because we ‘can’t buy manna in bulk’ (15). Ultimately, waiting deepens our trust in God’s sovereign plan. Waiting helps us better understand the eschatological phrase ‘already but not yet.’ Believers currently participate in God’s kingdom, though we know the kingdom’s full realization is still to come. Waiting is the basic condition of the church, since ‘uncertainty, tension, and waiting are how the church began’ (84). Waiting, therefore, is an inescapable part of following Christ as we long for his return and for the restoration of all things.*”³

- Vroegop writes, “*Waiting on God is living on what I know to be true about God, when I don’t know what’s true about my life.*”⁴ What truths about God can sustain us in our own seasons of uncertainty and waiting?

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Third Millennium Ministries, world missions partners

¹ Morris, Leon. *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. 1984, Grand Rapids, Wm Eerdmans Publishing. 45

² Beale, G.K. 1 & 2 Thessalonians: A Commentary on the New Testament. 2003, Downers Grove, IVP Academic. 58

³ Gross, Brian. *Don’t Waste Your Wait*. June 26, 2024. TGC.org. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/waiting-not-waste/>

⁴ Vroegop, Mark. *How God Uses Our Waiting*. July 5, 2020. TGC.org. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-god-uses-waiting/>