

Week 3

Day 1

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:13-20** below three times and then follow the instructions that follow:

This is why we constantly thank God, because when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, the word of God, which also works effectively in you who believe. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, since you have also suffered the same things from people of your own country, just as they did from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us. They displease God and are hostile to everyone, by keeping us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. As a result, they are constantly filling up their sins to the limit, and wrath has overtaken them at last.

But as for us, brothers and sisters, after we were forced to leave you for a short time (in person, not in heart), we greatly desired and made every effort to return and see you face to face. So we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. For who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Indeed you are our glory and joy!

1. Circle any words that seem important to you in this passage.
2. Put squares around the verbs (action words) in this passage.
3. Write down three questions that you have after reading this passage:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
4. What encourages you from this passage?
5. What challenges you from this passage?
6. What would you say is the main idea of this passage?
7. Choose a verse or group of verses that you will memorize this week. Write that verse or those verses below:

Day 2

1. If you had to give a definition of the Bible to someone who has never read or seen it, how would you define it? What word or words do you think would be required to have an adequate definition?

2. Do you think there is a difference between the Word of God and the Bible? If so, what is the difference?

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:13**.

3. What does Paul mean here by the term “Word of God”?

This verse represents the beginning of the second thanksgiving passage in 1 Thessalonians. Here Paul gives a little more detail about why he is so thrilled over the response of the church in Thessalonica. Specifically, the response of the Thessalonian church to God’s Word thrilled Paul. When they heard the message that he brought, they recognized that he was speaking divine truth, and with their reception of this truth came a willing response to submit to its authority.

Read **Hebrews 1:1-2**.

4. List as many of the “different ways” that God spoke through prophets and other means in the Old Testament:

Read **John 1:1-4, 14**.

5. How do **Hebrews 1:1-2** and **John 1:1-4, 14** relate to one another?

Ultimately, the Bible is a book that reveals God to us - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Throughout the stories and teachings that are gathered into 66 books of Old and New Testament, the purpose of the entire book is to show us who God is - specifically through the Gospel message of Jesus coming to rescue us.

In his book, *Taking God at His Word*, Kevin DeYoung says that the Bible is knowable, necessary, and enough. Take a moment and explain how those three words are true about the Bible in your own life:

Knowable:

Necessary:

Enough:

6. Write down one truth that you learned today.

Day 3

Around the world, persecution is much more common than Christians in a Western context want to believe. Within the last year, there have been:

- Over 260 million Christians living in places where they have experienced high levels of persecution
- 2,983 Christians killed for their faith
- 9,488 churches and other Christian buildings attacked
- 3,711 believers detained without trial, arrested, sentenced, or imprisoned

1. Which of those four statistics affects you the most? Why?

Suffering is one of the most difficult aspects of life that we can face, and its difficulty is not diminished if we are Christians. When we suffer, or when someone else suffers, we are often at a loss as to what to do or how to handle it, but the Bible says a great deal about suffering, and it provides a proper understanding of suffering in the life of a believer. Paul's letters to the church in Thessalonica help us see suffering from God's perspective.

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:14-17**.

2. Why does Paul commend their faith in this second thanksgiving?

3. Think of a time in your life when you felt like you were suffering. How did you feel about God in the midst of that time?

In Scripture, there are two basic types of suffering that are described. One is called redemptive suffering. Redemptive suffering for believers is allowed by God with a purpose of attempting to conform us to the image of Christ. Believers in the midst of suffering can cling to Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

By examining Scripture, we can see more specific reasons that God allows suffering in our lives. According to Scripture, suffering in the life of the believer takes place in order that we might experience:

1. **Repentance**: suffering is a call for us and others to turn from treasuring anything on earth above God.

2 . **Reliance**: suffering is a call to trust God, not the life-sustaining props of the world.

3. **Righteousness**: suffering is the discipline of our living heavenly Father so that we come to share his holiness.

4. **Reward**: suffering is working for us a great reward in heaven that will make up for every loss here a thousand-fold.

5. **Reminder**: suffering reminds us that God sent His Son to the world to suffer so that our suffering would not be God's condemnation but his purification.

4. When you consider the current situation in which you are living as a part of a country walking through a pandemic, which of those five reasons stands out to you the most right now? Which of the five would be the hardest for you to accept?

5. On a separate sheet of paper, write out times that God has used suffering to accomplish the five goals listed.

Scripture also speaks of suffering that is a result of condemnation or judgement for non-believers. Paul's concern in this passage is to explain both views of suffering. Paul helps us to see as Christians that our suffering is for the purpose of sanctification as God conforms us to the image of Christ. On the other hand, he also demonstrates that unbelievers could be suffering under the wrath of condemnation.

5. List some examples in these verses that show that Paul is speaking about suffering as a part of judgement on unbelievers:

6. Why do you think modern Christians are uncomfortable with this understanding of suffering?

As we finish this day, don't forget the author of the book. Paul had the unique perspective of someone who had both experienced severe persecution and had also persecuted the church severely. Paul was someone who was an unbeliever who was destined for an eternity apart from God. But God saved Paul on the Road to Damascus and the persecutor became the planter. And God can do that for anyone. Praise Be to God!

7. Write down one truth that you learned today.

Day 4

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:18-20

You will recall that Paul's departure from Thessalonica was abrupt and unplanned (Acts 17:5–10). After the assault on Jason's house, Paul and Silas were shipped off to the next town, Berea, under the cover of darkness. From the time of that hasty departure, Paul was filled with intense desire to return to them. This very desire attests to the power of their relationships. In fact, the phrase *"having been taken away from you"* meant in Paul's language *"having been orphaned."*

1. When was a time in your life when you felt like an important relationship was taken from you?

2. How did that relationship being taken away affect you physically, emotionally, and spiritually?

The old saying is that *"absence makes the heart grow fonder."* G.W. Demarest says he sees *"separations to be opportunities for growth in my love and gratitude for (those closest to me). Togetherness keeps us in touch with reality. Apartness allows us to idealize the relationship. We need both. I find that the togetherness that follows the separation is always very special. The rhythm is important to growth.*

3. Do you agree with G.W. Demarest? Why or why not?

4. How has our social distancing over the last several weeks impacted your understanding of relationships and the importance of gathering together with friends or relatives?

5. What has been the most difficult part of social distancing for you?

What Paul shows us in this passage is that even without physically being able to come to visit them in Thessalonica, he was blessed by his relationship with these believers. Growing relationships in Christ give us hope for the future—they can only improve with age. They give us joy in the present that comes from knowing one is loved. These relationships point to the day when we shall hug one another *“in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming.”* The word used here for Jesus’ coming is *parousia*. It is the first mention of the Second Coming of Jesus in this book, but it will be a major discussion going forward.

Paul concludes this chapter of 1 Thessalonians by reminding them that he finds his joy in them. He uses a word to declare that any fame or renown that comes to him is not because of his acts. No, he says, the believers and the way that they have had their lives changed by Christ is what brings fame and renown. In other words, Paul tells the Thessalonians that they are his source of honor.

6. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 5

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:13-20**.

As we finish our week together, I want us to focus on three truths that we see Paul teaching in this section of 1 Thessalonians:

**We Must Receive
the Word of God**

Paul started this entire section praising the church of the Thessalonians for the way that they had received the Word of God in their lives. Paul makes it clear that their reception of the Word of God was much more than just intellectual or emotional. They had allowed God's Word to enter their lives and transform who they were.

Read **Hebrews 4:12**.

1. When is an occasion in your life when you have received God's Word in a way that you allowed it to change you?

**We Must Grow in the
Midst of Trials**

Paul also commended the believers in the Thessalonian church for the way that they not only survived, but thrived in the midst of difficulty and persecution. In order for us to grow in the midst of our difficulties, we must be willing to seek God and his plan in each moment of those trials. We also take time to look for inspiration from people who have successfully navigated difficult situations for the glory of God.

Read **James 1:1-4**

2. What is one area that you would like to grow in your faith in our current situation?

3. Spend a few minutes reading stories on opendoorsusa.org. Then pray for the people in the stories that you read and for courage to stand in the midst of trials.

**We Must Cherish Our
Christian Relationships**

As a reminder of the importance of gratitude in our lives, take the following actions:

1. Hand write a letter of gratitude to another believer in your life - someone who had a positive impact on your spiritual life. Put it in the mail.
2. Call a fellow believer in your life with whom you have lost contact.
3. Write an email to a fellow believer and tell them the ways that they have positively impacted your life.
4. Text a fellow believer simply to encourage them in the midst of this difficult situation.