



AS WE WAIT FOR JESUS' RETURN

Studies in 1 Thessalonians

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Introduction

Have you ever wondered what a flourishing church looks like? As we unpack 1 Thessalonians we get a picture of a church that is going well. In this letter, Paul first starts by praising God that He has worked powerfully in this church and they living out their faith (chapters 1-3). He then moves to challenge them to keep growing as followers of Jesus (chapters 4-5).

This letter was written to a young church plant established by Paul in a port town of approx. 200,000 (much like Townsville). First Thessalonians is possibly the earliest letter we have from Paul, written approx. 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. We can never be 100% confident of the context that the Christians are living in, in any letter in the bible. But based on what the letter contains, and the account in Acts 17, we can piece together what life may have been like for those Christians and the challenges and joys they may have been facing. We know from Acts that after taking the Gospel to Thessalonica, Paul and his companions were forced out of the city as a result of a riot stirred up by some of those synagogue members who had rejected the gospel.

To understand the background to 1 Thessalonians READ ACTS 17:1-10.

Paul covers a lot of ground in this letter. While this church is doing well, it appears they are a little anxious. Paul's antidotes for this anxiety come through in 5 really helpful themes that come out of this letter.

Focus on the **Gospel**

Paul refers to 'the gospel' ten times in this letter. Whilst he doesn't spell it out as he does in other letters, the death and resurrection of Jesus underpins everything Paul argues in this letter.

Focus on **Remembering**

Whilst this church is flourishing, they do appear a little anxious about the future. So Paul reminds them of the past, and what God has done for them through Jesus to give them confidence and assurance.

Focus on **Pleasing God**

With so many pressures and distractions pulling at the Thessalonian Christians, Paul encourages them to focus on living in a way that pleases God.

Focus on **Community**

As the people of God, this community looks totally different to everyone around them because of the way they love each other and share a common identity in Jesus. Our eternal confidence doesn't rob of us our capacity to care and love deeply now, but empowers us to do so.

Focus on the **Future**

Paul reminds them of the wonderful future hope that awaits Christians when Jesus returns and that while they wait, they have nothing to fear.

1

Turning, Serving, Waiting

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Getting started

If you were to imagine the 'model church', how would you describe it?

Explore

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1. What is significant about Paul's introduction in verse 1? Why is this a comfort to them?
2. What does Paul remember about these Christians?
3. How does Paul know that they are loved and chosen by God?
4. What comfort is there in Paul reminding these Christians in verse 4 that "they are loved by God, and he has chosen them"? What is the basis of God choosing them?
5. When Paul planted the church in Thessalonica, how did they respond to Paul? How was the church in Thessalonica viewed by other churches in their part of the world?

6. What did they turn from? What, or who did they turn to?

7. What does it mean to serve the living and true God? What does this involve?

Apply

8. Who are you imitating? Who do you look up to? Do you need to be more intentional about choosing godly Christian role models? Do you set an example worth imitating?

9. What idols are you currently serving that you need to turn from?

10. What things can you practically do, to make sure that you are waiting for Jesus' return? What would it look like in your day to day if you were actively waiting for Jesus' return?

Pray

What's something you can pray in response to God's word?

What's something others can pray for you?

2 Walking in Manner Worthy

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Getting started

What are the sorts of things that you look for in a Christian leader? Which do you consider most important?

Explore

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

1. What kind of challenges had Paul and his coworkers previously faced in their ministry?
2. What behaviours **did not** characterise Paul's ministry?
3. Even though Paul could have asserted his authority how **did** Paul and his coworkers behave when they were with them?
4. What did Paul share with this church? What does that mean?
5. Why did they do this? What was his goal for this church? V12

6. What do you think it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel? Why do we do this?

7. If these guys are genuine Christians, and Paul's ministry was genuine, then why are they suffering? How should they view this suffering?

Apply

8. How can you like Paul be sharing not only the Gospel with people but your lives as well? What are some practical things?

9. What things can you do to walk better in a manner worthy of the Lord?

10. What would you say was Paul's key motivation and number one goal for this church? Would you say that is true for you?

Pray

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What's something others can pray for you?

3 What are your priorities?

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

Getting started

In order of importance, what are three things you would like to make happen in the next 12 months? Why did you pick that order?

Explore

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

1. After being separated from this church, what did Paul want to do? Why did he want to do this?
2. Why was he unable to return? What does it tell us about the reality of Gospel ministry?
3. Why did Paul send Timothy to the church in Thessalonica?
4. How did Paul prepare this church for this moment?

5. What was Timothy's report of how this church is going?

6. How did Paul respond to this report in verse 8? What does this show us about his heart?

7. What is Paul's prayer for himself and the Thessalonian's?

Apply

8. "For now I live, if ..." How would you finish this phrase? "For now I live if I...get that job...buy that car...finish that exam...?" Paul is so invested in this little church, that he views life in abundance as seeing his friends keep following Jesus. How might your priorities need to shift? What practical changes could you make to reflect this?

9. Similarly, if we go back to the opening question, about your priorities and things you want to tick off, how might your answer change in response to this passage? In what ways could you grow to share Paul's affection?

Pray

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What's something others can pray for you?

4 Pressing On

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Getting started

When people say, 'I want to know God's will for my life', what comes to mind?

Explore

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

1. What does Paul want the Thessalonians to keep on doing?
2. What is God's will for the Thessalonians? What does this mean? Is it what you would have expected?
3. What sort of stuff does Paul want these Christians to steer clear of? Why?
4. What are three reasons Paul gives for why it is important to be sanctified in this way?
5. According to verse 8, what is our role, and the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification (making us more godly and Holy)?

6. What indication does Paul give that these Christians are on the right track?

7. Paul's instruction is that they should have an ambition for a 'quiet life' What do you think this means? Why is this?

Apply

8. In what areas of your life, are you most conscious of your need to grow in holiness and godliness? Can you think of some areas in which God has already been at work?

9. How do your aspirations for your life compare to Paul's instruction in verses 11-12? How do the instructions in this verse challenge or reshape your aspirations?

Pray

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What's something others can pray for you?

5 Hope in Grief.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Getting started

If you have ever been to a funeral, what is something helpful that you could say to comfort a Christian who is grieving? What is something unhelpful?

Explore

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1. Why does Paul address the topic of what happens after death?
2. What do you think Paul means by “those who sleep in death”? (See Luke 23:43, Luke 16:19-31, 2 Cor 5:8 & Phil 1:23)
3. What is the source of their hope in verse 14?
4. Will those who ‘sleep in death’ miss out in any way when Jesus returns?
5. Assuming we are not part of the last generation before Jesus returns, what happens to us?
6. What is the final fate of those who trust in Jesus?

7. According to verses 16 & 17, how should we understand the ‘physicalness’ of the resurrection?

8. In writing this, Paul expects that this hope will change our grief. How do you think it makes a difference?

Apply

9. Paul closes this section by saying “encourage one another with these words”. From this passage, how could you encourage followers of Jesus who have lost loved ones? In your own words, would what you say next time?

10. Why does looking forward to Jesus’ return help us with the anxieties of each day?

Pray

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What’s something others can pray for you?

6 Be ready, be armed, and live as the light.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-28

Getting started

Think of a time when you had a big event coming up (wedding, moving, new job). What did you do to get ready for it?

Explore

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-28

1. How will the Lord come?
2. Why shouldn't we be surprised when this happens? (v2)
3. What does Paul mean when he says we shouldn't 'sleep' given this day is coming? Is it the same as 4:13? What do you think our posture should be given who we are and this day is coming?
4. Paul says one way to be 'sober' means "*putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet*". What is the basis of this faith, hope and love in verses 9-10?
5. In the original language, verse 12 says "the ones labouring among you and taking the lead", so he is speaking of leaders in the church. What does he say their role is? And how should we respond to it?

6. How are they to interact with each other? In your own words, how would you describe this sort of community Paul is describing?

7. Paul calls them to “rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances”
What reason do they have for this joy and what reason do they have to give thanks to God for?

8. What is Paul’s final prayer for this church (and all Christians) in verses 23-28? In your own words, what is he praying for?

Apply

9. How does the fact that Jesus is coming back shape your life now? How might it?

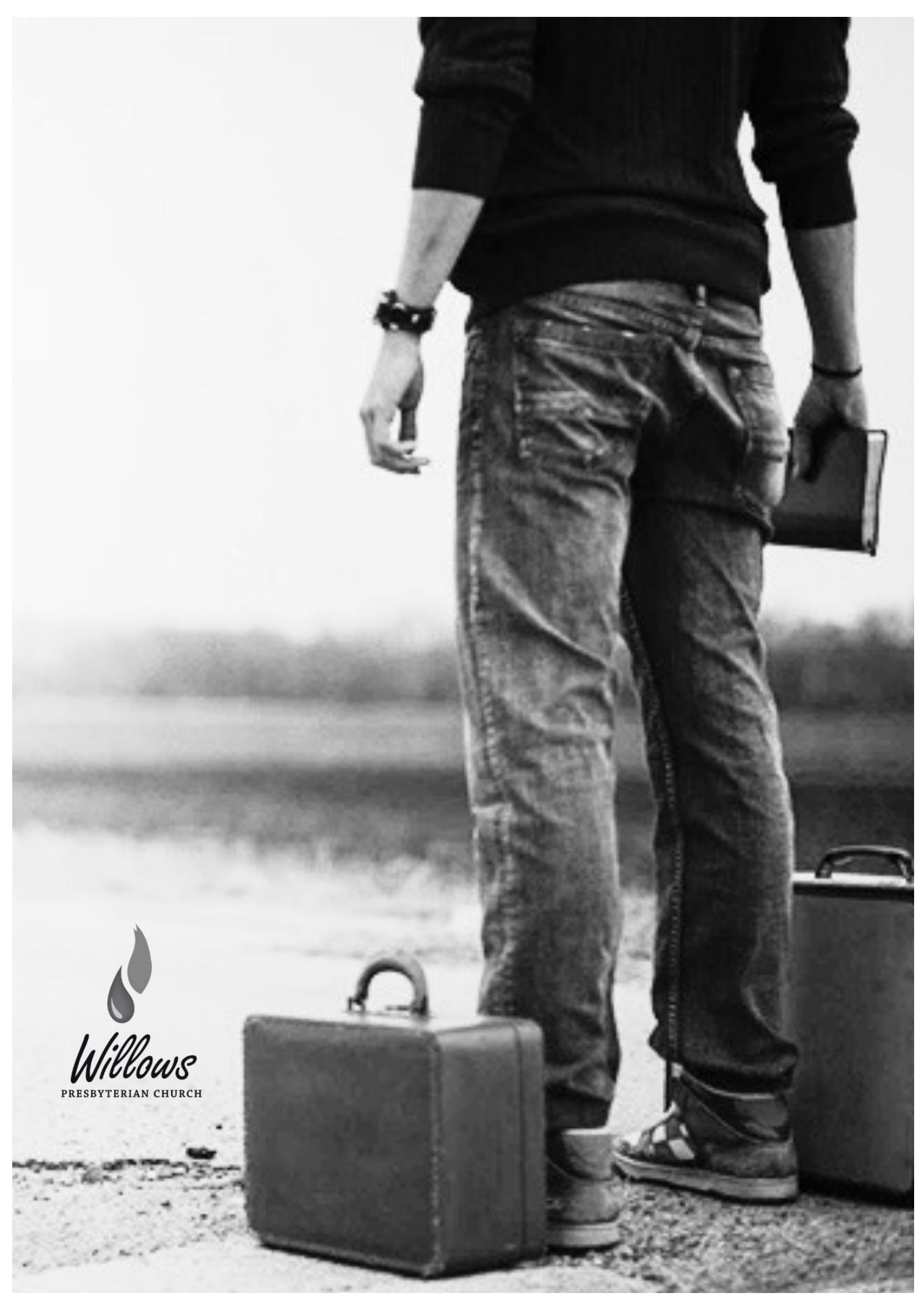
10. What might it mean for you to “keep awake and be sober” (v 6) in your present circumstances? What changes might it involve?

11. What is one area that you could work on from verses 12-18 as we live in wait for Jesus’ return?

Pray

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What’s something others can pray for you?



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