

# Journey Into Steadfast Living

## LESSON 1 . . . Making the Most of Your Faith (2 Thessalonians 1:1-4)

**P**aul wrote this epistle about a year after he wrote *1 Thessalonians*, probably around A.D. 51. Paul and his associates—Silas and Timothy—visited Thessalonica on Paul’s second missionary journey, proclaiming in the synagogue of the Jews that Jesus is *Christ* (Acts 17:1-3). As a result, what happens (Acts 17:4)?

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However, Paul has to leave suddenly because of persecution. Therefore, he writes *1 Thessalonians* to comfort and encourage them. About a year later, Paul learns that false teachings have infiltrated the church. So, he writes *2 Thessalonians* to clarify events that would precede Christ’s return and to correct false teaching (2:1-12). He also wants to instruct believers about the age-old problem of dealing with moochers and lazy believers (3:6-15).

In his introduction (1:1-4), Paul offers **four** principles for **making the most of your faith**. First is . . .

### Utilize other believers (1:1).

Paul opens this epistle, as usual, by identifying himself and his companions. First is *Silvanus*, or Silas (1:1a). What does Acts 15:32 reveal about Silas?

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This means Silas was a gifted speaker who spoke to edify, encourage, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). (For more on the gift of prophecy, see *Journey To Your Spiritual Gift*, pages 31-33.)

After Paul’s first missionary journey, he and Barnabas part ways because they disagree over taking John Mark with them on the second journey. Barnabas takes John Mark, and they sail for Cyprus (Acts 15:36-39). What does Paul do (Acts 15:40a)?

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NOTES



Next, Paul mentions *Timotheus*, or Timothy (1:1a). In Lystra, while on his second missionary journey, Paul and Silas had met young Timothy, who was already a believer (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy had probably been won to the Lord through his mother and grandmother who possibly became believers during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:8-23).

Because Timothy has an outstanding reputation as a believer, when Paul and Silas return to Lystra, they invite Timothy to join them. Paul sometimes sent Timothy as his representative to the churches. At other times, Timothy stayed to disciple new believers while Paul went on to evangelize in other places.

A few months before writing this epistle, Paul sends Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the believers' faith. Timothy returns with good news of their *faith and charity*, or love (1 Thess. 3:4-7). However, Paul later hears about problems in the church, which compels him to write this epistle.

Paul greets his original readers: *unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (1:1b). Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, the northernmost province in Greece, and was a seaport city. Today, the city is known as Salonika (Suhlawn'-uh-kuh) and has a population of more than 400,000, making it similar in size to Tulsa, Oklahoma, or Omaha, Nebraska. Salonika (Thessalonica) had a large Jewish population until World War II, when the Nazis murdered or deported them. Because of its strategic location, this city played a major role in both the First and Second World Wars.

Paul made the most of his faith in Thessalonica by enlisting other believers to help him. If you want to make the most of your faith, **utilize other believers** and . . .

## **Recognize the Source of spiritual power (1:2).**

Next, Paul gives his usual greeting: *Grace unto you, and peace* (1:2a). The word *grace* refers to both God's unmerited favor and His divine enablement. In this passage, since his readers are already Christians, Paul is writing about empowering grace, not saving grace.

God doesn't just save us *by grace* (Eph. 2:8); He also gives us empowering grace to fulfill His will for our lives. We are saved to serve, not to sit. God doesn't want us to be just "pew-warmers" or spiritual spectators. After declaring we are saved by grace, how does Paul explain the reason in Ephesians 2:10a-b?

We are not saved **by** *good works*; we are saved **for** *good works* by God's glorious *grace* (emphasis mine).

*Peace* (1:2a) refers to the end of the hostility between God and sinners. It is the peace Christ made available to sinners through His death on the cross (Rom. 5:1). Peace is the result of experiencing God's grace.

This grace and the resulting peace are *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (1:2b). The preposition *from* is not repeated because Paul associates Jesus with God as the single Source of grace and peace. Jesus is the fully divine Son of God and the second Person of the Trinity.

To experience spiritual power and make the most of our faith, we must recognize the Source. What does Paul write in 1 Corinthians 15:10c-d?

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The source of spiritual power is the empowering *grace of God* that is always available to us as believers.

To make the most of your faith, **utilize other believers, recognize the Source of spiritual power**, and . . .

### **Realize the benefits of persecution (1:3).**

Paul next writes, *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren* (1:3a). Paul usually begins his letters by stating what he most appreciates about his readers. He praises the Thessalonian believers because their *faith groweth exceedingly* (1:3b). The word translated *exceedingly* (HUPERAUxonō, hoop-er-owx-an'-oh) means to increase beyond what is expected, or the norm.

Their faith has grown despite severe persecution. Persecution quickly weeds out false faith. In the parable of the soils (Mt 13:1-9, 18-23), Jesus talks about the seed, which is the word of God. Sometimes it is sown on the rocky soil, which represents a shallow or superficial faith. In Matthew 13:21, how does our Lord describe a person with this kind of faith?

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Genuine faith grows *exceedingly* during persecution, while false faith falls away. The same persecution that causes false believers to fall away causes the faith of true believers to grow because it drives them closer to God.



Next, Paul praises them for their *charity . . . toward each other*, which *aboundeth* (1:3c). The word translated *charity*, or love (AGAPĒ, ag'-ah-pay or uh-gop'-ay), is not a sentimental or emotional feeling. It is the sacrificial love, or "Calvary love," that reveals itself in all true believers. How does Jesus declare this fact in John 13:35?

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The word translated *love* is AGAPĒ, which means true believers will manifest their faith by demonstrating sacrificial love for fellow believers. When believers exhibit this kind of love, we grow closer together when facing a common persecution, and become even more steadfast.

To make the most of your faith, **utilize other believers, recognize the Source of spiritual power, realize the benefits of persecution, and . . .**

### **Epitomize steadfastness (1:4).**

Paul writes, *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience* (1:4a). The word translated *patience* (HYPOMONĒ, hoop-om-on-ay') refers to courageous endurance, or steadfastness. So, the result of faith and love in the Christian life is steadfastness.

The result of their *patience* is the Thessalonians are enduring *persecutions and tribulations* (1:4b). The word *persecutions* (DIŌGMOS, de-og-mos') refers to hostile actions, while *tribulations* refers to hardships that result from persecution. Only when we demonstrate steadfastness are we able to experience what wonderful promise in Isaiah 40:29?

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God never wastes a persecution or a tribulation. He wants to use it to cause us to grow spiritually and to be the epitome of steadfast living.

To make the most of your faith, **utilize other believers, recognize the Source of spiritual power, realize the benefits of persecution, and epitomize steadfastness.**