

Rejoicing At The Report

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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Getting report cards was not my favorite part of high school, seeing as I was never an excellent student. Regardless, they were a regular part of my academic career and they were helpful to my parents to know how to best “encourage” me. For the Apostle Paul, there were many concerns on his heart and mind as he waited to hear the report card that Timothy was bringing him from the young church in Thessalonica. Paul had been run out of town by those who opposed the gospel and he was anxious to hear if the opposition had been successful with the fledgling believers, or if they had overcome the persecution and were remaining faithful. What we will clearly see, is that

Devotion to spiritual growth results in a life of significance.

A Profound Thanksgiving (1:2-5)

Upon hearing the report from Timothy, the thanksgiving that Paul expressed was far more than just a passing gladness. These three verses are packed with joy and profound significance. There are three primary components to Paul and his companions' thanks: a *constant mentioning* (v2), a *remembering* (v3), and a *knowing* (v4).

Paul and his companions didn't just gladly remember these young believers in Thessalonica, but they consistently brought them up before God in their times of corporate prayer, and with great thanksgiving. It was not haphazard or random, the idea Paul is expressing is that they were disciplined and persistent in their prayers for these dear brothers and sisters.

Paul then moves on to describe why their times of prayer were filled with thanksgiving rather than concern. Timothy's report made it clear that these young believers had devoted themselves to spiritual growth seen in their “*work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope*”. (v3) Faith, hope and love are the triad of christian virtue and markers of sanctification. They are seen together in numerous passages in the New Testament describing the full and ideal christian character.¹ Paul's concerns over their ability to flourish in such harsh opposition had been fully put to rest. This young christian church was defined by their devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ and love for one another. It doesn't take much to imagine the joy and relief Paul must have experienced when he heard the report from Timothy. Many of us know first hand that joy and relief as we hear about the faithfulness of those believers we have had the joy and opportunity to disciple.

Lastly, Paul was convinced that these dear people were loved by God and had been chosen by Him. Paul's confidence in their election came from seeing how the gospel had come to them. This good news, which Paul described as “*the power of God for*

¹ 1 Thess 5:8; Rom. 5:1–5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5–6; Col. 1:4–5; 1 Pet. 1:21–22; Heb. 10:22–24

salvation..." (Romans 1:16) hadn't just been laid out in a reasoned argument to them, but had come to them *"in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"* (v4). This gospel which they had received with faith in the Lord Jesus had brought about the powerful transformation of their character, by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and it was a message that these young believers had full confidence in. So much confidence in fact, that these young believers had already begun to set an example for other believers in the region!

A Powerful Example (1:6-10)

There is a clear pattern for Christians to follow that was established by Jesus and the first disciples. The word used for this pattern is discipleship. Jesus called people to follow him and learn from him what God desired and how to honor God with their lives. Jesus did this in two primary ways: he would **teach** and **model** for his disciples what that life looked like. That is the heart of discipleship. Paul did that when he was in Thessalonica, and he rejoiced in the report that these young believers not only had become imitators of Paul, Timothy and Silas, but that they had begun setting the example for other believers in Macedonia. They had matured from disciples to disciple makers in a very short period of time. Their teaching and exemplary Christian lifestyle was a standard for other believers to follow. These young believers, made up mostly from the gentile population, had wasted no time in their pursuit of loving God, loving others and making disciples. They had embraced their new identity as servants of the living and true God and as a result their lives had taken on great significance in the region.

The model that these young believers set was incredible! And it is a model not just for the churches in ancient Macedonia, but is a model for us in 2024 as well! Have we embraced our identity as servants of the living and true God? Have we committed ourselves to not just learning about the life that God desires, but to living it and beyond that, developing relationships with people who we can **teach** and **model** our Christian lives to? The reality of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ was not a source of fear for these young believers, rather it was a source of motivation and hope. May this motivate us to live lives of significance, devoted to faith, hope, and love.

GRACE NEWS AND NEEDS

Grace Family Desert Trip To Ocotillo: Feb 23-25. Join families from Grace for a great weekend in the desert! Saturday night dinner provided. Sign up @ Men's Ministry kiosk on the patio.

VOM Needs for February: Band-Aids