Chosen October 18, 2026

Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 1:1-10

1 This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May God give you grace and peace.

2 We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. 3 As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. 5 For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. 6 So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. 7 As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece — throughout both Macedonia and Achaia.

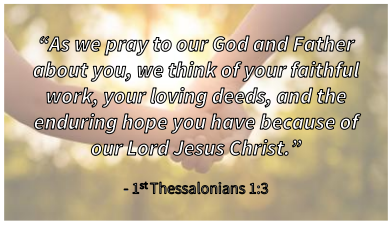
8 And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, 9 for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. 10 And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven — Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.



As we begin this new series "Always Give Thanks," we begin with some context. This letter is one of Paul's earliest letters.

Scholars date this letter to about 51 A.D. Paul and Silas had been there just a few months before, likely in the early summer. During their initial visit on Paul's second missionary journey, they shared the good news of Jesus Christ, and the believers accepted Jesus into their hearts. Jealous Jews had stirred up trouble, causing Paul and Silas to flee in the night. About two or three months later, Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to check on the believers. Timothy returned with a good report and with some questions from the new believers. This letter is first a letter of encouragement, assurance, and love to and for this new church that is standing firm in their faith and remaining unified in Christ.

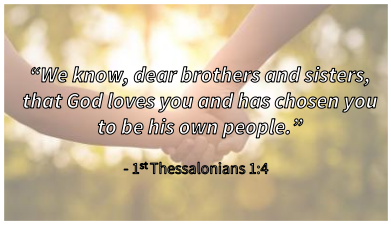
The title for this series comes from chapter 1, verse 2, where Paul writes, *"We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly."* This thanksgiving and prayer comes from Timothy's report of their faithfulness and unity in Christ. And it comes from knowing the conditions in Thessalonica. This large, cosmopolitan city of almost 200,000 sat along the major trade route between Rome and the far east. It was a wealthy and thriving center of trade. With its international make-up, there were many pagan religions and many cultural influences that challenged the faith of these new believers. And yet, and yet they stayed faithful to Jesus and to one another. Yes, these were great reasons for Paul to offer these words of praise and thanksgiving!



Turning to verse 2, Paul gets specific about his praise and thanksgiving. Here we read, *"As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ."* The church in Thessalonica is faithfully working, living as and being Christ to one another and to the world around them. These new believers were witnesses to Christ in the ways that they worked and loved in the world: caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, taking in the stranger, welcoming all.

And they lived faithfully and stayed together in a world that often persecuted and harassed them. It was through the enduring hope that they found in Christ that these new believers were able to stand strong in their faith. Timothy had visited and observed these things. Now Paul is commending them for their faithfulness and for their perseverance. This newly formed church was a beacon, a light of Christ shining not only in Thessalonica but also out into the wider world. But the road is long and it can be hard. So, as we turn to verse 4, Paul begins to offer words of reminder and of encouragement. As we prepare to delve into the heart of today's message, let us begin with a centering prayer…

> *Creator God, we come from you, spoken into being by your Word, made in your image. Speak to us now; re-shape us again by your Word of love, as a potter re-shaping a vessel. Shape us to be better imitators of Christ. We belong to you. Make us as you desire and use us as you wish. We pray in the name of Christ and the power of your Holy Spirit. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and that the meditation of all of our hearts would be pleasing in your sight. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.*



In verse 4 we read these words: *"We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people."* Please note Paul's word choice here. He does not say that they hope God loves and chooses them. He does not say that we think that God loves and has chosen them. No, Paul says *"we know."* He reminds these new believers that Paul and his companions know that God loves and has chosen the believers in Thessalonica. To know something, that requires some proof, right? Yes, there is the evidence that we have already talked about – the faithful works, the good deeds, and the enduring hope.

But there is more – much more. Before we get into that, though, let us address the hard word in this verse: chosen. What does it mean to be chosen? This is something that we have all experienced – likely both for good and for bad. For some of us, we were the first ones chosen for kickball or football or for the lead role in the play or orchestra. Maybe we were the first one chosen for a new position at work or for that special award that came with a plaque or trophy. To be chosen in these ways is wonderful and awesome.



For others, we know a different side of being chosen. We were the one at the end of the selection process, the one that often heard, "I guess I have to take ___." We were the ones who kept getting passed over or overlooked or ignored. Some of us know that side of chosenness. Yes, some of us know what it feels like to be excluded, left out or left off. We will come back around to this issue, but for now we will name this reality: there are people who feel unchosen by God and therefore feel unwelcome in our communities of faith.

In our text today, Paul does give evidence for knowing that these new believers in Thessalonica were indeed chosen by God. This began with Paul and Silas bringing the word of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, to the Thessalonians. They came and got their attention. The people listened to the words that Paul and Silas spoke. But this is not proof that they were chosen by God. Their chosenness, their inclusion in the family of God, their belonging in the church – it came because they received the word, because they took the word of God into their hearts. And through receiving and accepting the word of God, these new believers received power from the Holy Spirit. Through this power within, *"the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true."* The Thessalonians' chosenness was not just because they heard the word but was because they believed in Jesus and received power from the Holy Spirit that came to dwell in their hearts.

Being chosen by God is not just hearing the words. It is also believing in Christ and in receiving power from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, you and I pass this litmus test of being chosen by God. How does that feel, my friends in Christ, to know that you have been chosen by God? How does that feel?

You know, sometimes we think of chosenness as something super special. Maybe when we think of chosenness in terms of faith, we think of Moses and King David, of John the Baptist and of Jesus and of Paul. Maybe when we think of faith lived out, we remind ourselves of people like Martin Luther King, Junior, and of people like Mother Teresa and Billy Graham. When we think of being chosen by God, I do believe that we can fall into thinking that it is about people like this and not about ordinary, everyday people like you and me. To be chosen – good for the heroes and heroines of our faith. Really, good for them. We do need people both from the Bible and from real life to look up to, to emulate, to imitate. Paul even throws that idea in here in verse 6: *"You imitated both us and the Lord."*

Paul's word here, *"you,"* my friends, is not singular but plural. He is not talking about an individual following Christ and Paul's example, but he is talking about the community of faith – both in Thessalonica and today – living out the faith, growing in faith, and acting in ways that revealed the faith to the world. There was fruit, there was evidence, in Thessalonica that the people of God were living out and growing in and revealing their faith to the world. Again, that was the faithful work, loving deeds, and hope-filled endurance that these new believers lived with and out every day. It was the witness that Timothy observed when he visited. It was the witness that Paul and Silas lived out when they were there teaching and living with the Thessalonians. My friends, I must ask: is this what a third-party person would observe and witness if he or she spent a week with you and me? Would a third-party observer see faithful work, loving deeds, and hope-filled endurance?

Belief in Jesus and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is like any gift of blessing from God. The gift is not meant just for us but is meant to be shared. We are chosen to be an influence in our world, to be an example for others. As we share our faith again and again, our chosenness becomes like a ripple. Our faithful works, loving deeds, and hope in the trial and suffering spread out from us and the one before us to others as we continue to seek to be Christ to the world. As the Spirit works in other's lives and hearts, the ripple effect begins as others offer kindness, compassion, and love to the world.



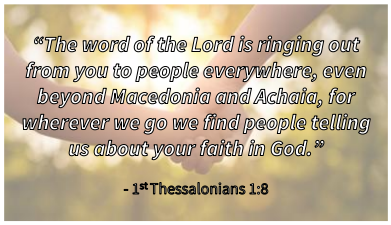
This ripple effect is important because there are people in our crazy world that wonder what it means to be a disciple of Christ. There are people who look at the things said and done in our world "in the name of Christ" and wonder if there is a better way. There are people who experience hard things and suffering in this life and wonder if there is anyone or anything that can bring peace or comfort or rest. These people find answers when they look to you or to our community of faith, to the witness that you and I and we give in word and deed, in mission and in service. They find answers when they are the ones engaging with us and they find answers when they hear about our witness from a friend or on social media.

Speaking of this ripple effect, I wonder how those outside of Thessalonica heard of the amazing witness of this faithful community of believers. Paul doesn't talk about spreading the news as he traveled from place to place. There was certainly no Facebook or any other social media platform. There was no internet or cell phones, no newspapers or television. In the end, we do not know how the news of their discipleship spread, but we do know that it spread. They were the proverbial "city on a hill" whose light shone out far and wide. People that passed through this cosmopolitan city and met these early Christians took the stories of goodness and kindness and love and compassion with them.

They went forth changed by their encounters. The ripples moved out with them just as ripples move out as people encounter those living faithfully in our world today.

You know, if they are paying attention, parents of young children learn pretty early on that they are always being watched by their children – even when they are not "on," even when they are not actively parenting. This thought brings me back to a day when I was walking a couple of weeks ago. It was at that time of the morning when parents were bringing children to school. As I neared an intersection with stops signs in all four directions, a car approached. I saw mom had her head down, scrolling on her cell phone. As she slowed slightly, rolling right through the stop sign, I wondered what her young child – maybe a second or third grader standing in the back seat – was learning in that moment. In the same way, what are we teaching a watching world when they see us speaking and acting in ways that are less than Christ calls us to be? These lesser choices also spread ripples.

As we continue in 1st Thessalonians, Paul lifts up the believers in Thessalonica for the ways that they have become an example to other believers in Greece. In verse 8 Paul notes that *"The word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God."* Ringing out from people everywhere. Just imagine what that would be like!



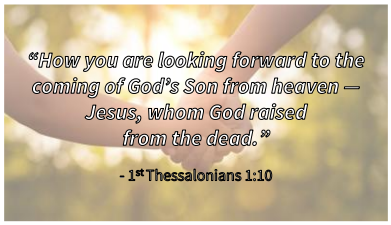
In some circles, the word is out there. With the schools and in other small groups, Grace is known as a place of love, as a place where help is available, as a people who care. But these are small circles. There are folks who drive by the church or see a poster for an event, and they wonder what it might be like to be a follower of Jesus, to be a "Christian." The news cycles and other forms of media give one answer. And it is often not a good or true answer.

Sure, these folks could come to church and find out for themselves. But they do not need to. They see you and they see me. They hear stories and they see posts. Maybe, if we are living out our faith, maybe they encounter one of us. In these encounters, whether firsthand or secondhand, do they see someone living out the joy of discipleship? Do they see a people who love God and all of our neighbors with equal passion and commitment?

Extending this line of thinking a little bit, what do your neighbors see when they look at you and at the ways that you live your life? What do our neighbors see when they look at our church? Do our neighbors wonder if they might be welcome if they were to wander through our doors? Or do they think that our church is more like a social club – one that they maybe do not have the credentials to join? These are good questions to consider, to think about as we seek to be good ripples moving out into our neighborhoods and into our world.

For the believers in the church in Thessalonica, the world looked at them and saw a group of people that had *"turned away from idols to serve the living and true God."* Their lives were noticeable. We are loved by and chosen by God to be noticeable too. Our call is to follow Christ, to put on his yoke, to live our faith outwardly, and to live our faith openly, in ways that increasingly stand out from the culture and world around us. The world chases after all kinds of idols that our culture says matter or are important. When our lives, values, priorities, and words and deeds are not defined by this way of living, but by a clear and steady effort to walk in the ways of Christ, others notice.

In Thessalonica, there was one other thing that the watching world noticed about these new believers. The people around them spoke of *"How you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven — Jesus, whom God raised from the dead."* They lived with an eye toward heaven.



Living with an eye towards Jesus' return brought them great hope. This was important as the new believers often faced persecution and experienced suffering in this life. Their hope in Christ helped them to endure these hardships. But this hope also fueled and drove their desire to live out their faith in the world. Because they knew that Jesus would return, they chose to live in ways that invited others into their way of living so that they too could know the hope that comes through knowing Christ resurrected and eternal.



As the founder of this church and as the one who modeled Christ to them, Paul gave thanks to God for the ways in which God was working in the lives of these new believers and for the noticeable ways that they were living out their faith. This day we join Paul in giving thanks. We are grateful and give our thanksgiving for God's call upon our lives and for the ways that God walks with us as we live a noticeable faith in this world. We give thanks for the opportunities for our faith to ripple out into the world in ways great and small. For this, we have been chosen. Beloved of God, may we go forth this week, living and loving in ways that tell others that they too are the beloved of God. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

1) *Grow.* How has the hope that you have in Christ grown as you matured in faith? In what ways have you become more "noticeable" in the ways that you live out of your faith?
2) *Pray.* When do you long for your faith and witness to ripple out, changing hearts and lives? Spend some time seeking God's guidance and direction this week.
3) *Study.* Read Galatians 6:7-10. What do these words add to your understanding of how our faith ripples can be both good and bad? What kind of a harvest do you desire?