Tested October 25, 2026

Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 2:1-8

1 You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition. 3 So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery. 4 For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. 5 Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! 6 As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else. 7 As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children. 8 We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too.



This week we move from "Chosen" to "Tested" as we push on in 1st Thessalonians. But based on some feedback that I received, I want to revisit the idea of being chosen briefly. Some are clearly chosen by God, right? We have lots of people in the Bible and still other people that we can name from the "real" world that are clearly chosen by God. These people are chosen by God to do big things for God, so to speak. But, my friends, using an example from last Sunday, Billy Graham wasn't always the Billy Graham that we know. And Paul, we remember that he was once a Pharisee named Saul who persecuted Christians. And then there is that Mom, the one who used to sit in the back row trying to manage three active kids, just trying to get through that hour on Sunday morning. She did not feel chosen back then.

But she hung in there, received a little encouragement along the way, and one day found herself teaching Sunday School. Reflecting on her journey that was not always easy and did not always move “forward,” she would now say that, yes, she was chosen by God. Thinking of this illustration that Tom shared, my mind went to another example of feeling a call and faithfully responding to God’s call on our lives. To hear the call is one thing. To respond and to step into the call is when we begin to experience how we are chosen by God.

Way back in 2014 Steve Hilton and I talked his brother into coming along on another mission trip, this time for our Seattle trip. We needed a bass player for the band. Adding another experienced adult chaperone was a bonus. Don and two other adults led Team 8, a group of nine youth from seven different churches across the Dakotas. On Tuesday of that week, Team 8 went to the Marra Farm, a 4-acre garden composed of a youth garden and a “giving garden.” A call was placed upon his heart. A “giving garden” – what if?... A 30’ by 30’ garden on the church property was the first response to being chosen by God for the task of feeding the less fortunate. It soon grew and grew and grew. The current church garden is 30’ by 120’. This year, the church garden yielded 2,125 pounds of food. Almost all of that was given to the less fortunate. 2,125 pounds of fresh produce, given away.





It is not always easy to respond to a call, to step into where God is leading. And as you can imagine, to continue to live into that call is not always easy either. This past Saturday we put the church garden to bed for the winter. Don and Cherie led and directed. Bob, Brenden, Keith, and I helped. As we were about to head home, Cherie shared something with me. She reflected on the past season and shared that it was a lot of work. Yes, it is a lot of work. And then she shared the joy that she felt every time they brought food to someone in need.

Don and Cherie bring food to the Cornerstone Rescue Mission, to the Women and Children's Home, and to the Piedmont Valley Food Bank. Cherie's joy is especially felt when they bring food to the Women and Children's Home. The women are always so grateful and so appreciative of the fresh vegetables. For Cherie, and I assume for Don, it is a great affirmation that all of the work is worth it. And it is a great reminder of how Don and Cherie were chosen by God, called into ministry to less fortunate.

We are not all called or chosen to be a Billy Graham or the next apostle Paul. Some of us are called and chosen to grow food so that we can feed people. Some of us are called and chosen to teach a Sunday School class so that others can grow in their faith. Some of us are called and chosen to be a light to those we work with or go to school with or play rec league soccer with. Some of us are called and chosen to love on our neighbors and some are called and chosen to stand against injustice and oppression.

The call, the chosenness, yes, it can be big and manifest itself in ways that clearly show how chosen that person is. But sometimes, more often than not I think, the call, the way that we respond to and live out our chosenness, is small and often feels like it goes unnoticed. Until you see a child's eyes light up when they have a jump in their faith. Until you feel the joy and gratitude from the people receiving a few bags of fresh produce. Until that co-worker or teammate comes to you in a quiet moment, asking for prayer or wanting to know more about your peace or contentment or compassion. My brothers and sisters in Christ, because we said "yes" to Jesus as Lord and Savior, we said "yes" to being called and chosen. While some of us may not know to what we're called or for what we have been chosen, hear these words of encouragement: God is faithful. God has plans for you. God is patient. Keep living as a child of God, keep growing in your faith. Trust that you will hear or sense a call. Believe that you are chosen by God for a reason. And in faith, step into that call and that chosenness.



And now, as we move from “Chosen” to “Tested,” please join me in an attitude of prayer.

God of love and mercy, we love because you first loved us. Open our hearts to your love as we listen for your Word. May the light of your love fill us, warm us, re-shape us, and empower us to love, in the name and the Spirit of Christ. 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.

Last week and just a moment ago, we heard that we are “chosen.” That is where we began this short exploration of 1st Thessalonians. As we move into chapter 2, we discover that we are also “tested.” Like chosen, tested is tricky word, sometimes a hard word. To flesh that out a bit, what comes to mind when you hear that as Christians we are tested? What comes to mind for you when you think of being tested?... I would add to those thoughts this question: In what ways does God test us or test our faith?...

For some of us, we see testing as a good thing. Well, maybe not the testing itself, but the outcome of our testing. While we would not usually choose to go through the valley, whether we are talking about a loss or another unwanted change or a difficult illness, we often find that when we hold onto our faith in God, we emerge on the other side of the valley stronger in our faith, more assured of who we are in Christ. There are times, though, when the valley is enough to break someone’s faith, to leave them believing that God is anything but loving, good, kind, and compassionate. The words “cruel, unfair, vengeful” come to mind as they think about the tragedy or the diagnosis or the other hardship that has unfairly or unexpectedly come their way.

Sometimes our difficulty when thinking about being "tested" centers on how similar being "tempted" can feel. Testing and temptation have some similarities. When we are being tested or tempted, for example, we usually have a choice to make, a decision to come to. Generally, that centers upon whether we will choose God or self, whether we will trust and have faith or if we decide to take matters into our own hands. Most of us also tend to think of testing and temptation as bad things. They can be, but when we draw near to God and listen to the Holy Spirit's voice, both can have the same positive end result: strengthening or refining our faith.

Turning to our text from 1st Thessalonians 2, Paul begins by reiterating that their visit to them was *"not a failure."* Paul spent much of what we call chapter 1 remembering how well things were going in Thessalonica. In spite of persecution, there was much evidence of their faithful works, loving deeds, and enduring hope, evidence that we remember was *"ringing out"* to all of the neighboring communities. Paul then touches on the suffering he and Silas endured in Philippi before reminding the Thessalonians that this did not stop them from proclaiming the good news to these new believers. Paul is also quick to point out how they were able to proclaim the good news boldly: *"God gave us the courage."*



In verse 4, Paul addresses "how" they shared the good news in Thessalonica. Here we read, *"For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts."* Paul and his co-laborers for the gospel have been examined by God, approved and entrusted to share the good news. It is important that Paul includes himself in this testing and examining. As the lead teacher and primary example of the faith for this young church, it is good for Paul to acknowledge that he is just like them, and they are just like him. Paul goes through the testing and the examination just like everyone in the church in Thessalonica.

Paul does not raise himself up above the Thessalonians or above us. He reminds them and us that he is right there in the struggle with them and, by extension, with us. For Paul, the testing is plural: "God tests *our* hearts." This promotes as sense of unity and community, a feeling of solidarity.



Paul invites those new believers to remember how Paul and Silas came to them. Speaking into that solidarity and unity, Paul also lays out the pattern for sharing the gospel with others. There are some things that this faithful witness is not. It is not about flattery. It is not about greed or lining one's own pockets. It is not about seeking human praise. Paul had to remind them of these things because there were false prophets and imposter Messiah's that would roll through towns, sounding good on the surface, promising miracles and such. Just put your money in the basket, then wait and see. These would be the pre-cursors to today's prosperity gospel preachers who say, "Just give enough and God will bless you." And if necessary, they will add, "If you're not being blessed, you're not giving enough to God."

Much of this rhetoric about how not to share the gospel might be Paul's response to accusations that he was in it for himself or for the popularity that comes from gathering and leading folks. There is often a suspicion that everyone is self-centered and that everyone seeks personal gain. From this point of view, it is believed that this inward focus drives and motivates our actions. Why was and is this a real thing? Because we have all lived and have all experienced this in real life. We once lived to glorify and satisfy self. And today, in our modern culture, there is no shortage of religious leaders living lavish lifestyles and/or engaging in behaviors that are decidedly not Christ-like.

Instead of living for self, Paul's witness was all about declaring the good news of Jesus Christ. The focus was the good news and the God behind this good news.

The message was all about the one who embodied the gospel, Jesus Christ. Paul's message had nothing to do with himself. In fact, it was only by setting aside self that he could truly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul did not come to elevate self or to gain more followers. He did not come to please people, but to please God. As further evidence, Paul adds a deeper dimension, beginning in verse 7.

Here, Paul basically says, "I could have come in and flashed my credentials or exerted by authority. I am an apostle after all." Because of his position or title, Paul could have demanded obedience and allegiance. Imagine what kind of pressure that would have put on these new believers! Sadly, though, we do not have to imagine. It happens in our day and age. People take the Bible and they weaponize the words inside, using phrases like "The Bible says so!" when condemning and making others feel less than. Some pastors do it too when they imply that congregants must believe something or must do something "because I am the pastor and I know better." Ever experienced these things?

Paul does not take this route or exert his authority over these new believers. He does just the opposite, first reminding the Thessalonians how he and his co-ministers choose to be like children amongst them – to be "gentle" with them is how it reads in some translations. Paul also compares their interactions with the Thessalonians to that of a mother with her children, feeding and caring for them. This brings to mind a sense of mutuality between Paul and these new believers and this new community of faith. In this last scenario – a mother with her children – there is an implication that Paul and his co-workers for the gospel relied on the Thessalonians just as they relied on Paul and Silas.



Their connection and reliance on one another is emphasized in verse 8. Here Paul writes, *"We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too."* Paul and his companions did not just share the good news with these new believers. They also shared their very lives. Paul became one of them, not just showing up on Sundays to preach a sermon but living right alongside them in the ordinary of life. In this way, Paul was modeling what it looked like to truly live out the gospel and the life of faith. We touched on this last week, but it is worth repeating. The world watches, seeing how we live out or fail to live out our faith. At the end of the day, the witness to our faith is revealed in the moment by moment, day by day ways that we love God and neighbor. For Paul, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ was not a job, it was his whole reason for existence. It was woven into all of his life just as the good news of Christ should be woven into all that we do and say, into all that we are.



This idea of faith being woven into who and what we are brings us back around to the idea of being tested. In this sense, testing is not a hardship or time of suffering or persecution that we might face. No, the testing comes in the daily living out of our faith. The testing comes when and because we choose to allow our faith to be woven into who we are, into all of the relationships in our lives, and into all of the encounters that we have day to day. Our faith is tested whenever we step out in faith, whenever we stand up against an injustice or evil, whenever we put ourselves out there loving God and neighbor, whenever we swim against the culture and the powers that be. Our faith is tested whenever we put ourselves at risk.

Sometimes, for example, the Spirit leads us to speak truth to someone. This can be a time of real testing. Whenever we have a difficult conversation with someone, we take a risk.

And even when seeking to please God and not people, sometimes our words are not pleasing to the other person, even when they are offered "gently." These hard conversations are ones that we will be chosen to have when we are living out our faith, actively seeking to follow the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. We all need to be held accountable at times. In these situations, for these conversations to be effective and transformative, it is important to remain humble and compassionate as we strive to lead in love.

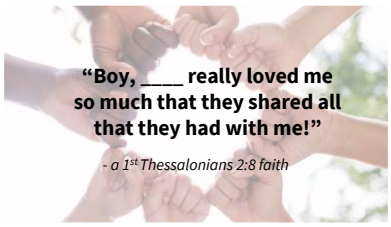
Brothers and sisters in Christ, I remind you that we are each chosen because we have responded to the call of Christ on our lives. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, that small voice that whispers and gently nudges us to live out our faith in noticeable ways, this is the power and presence of God alive in each of us. It assures us that, yes, we have been chosen for service to the kingdom of God, chosen because we are the beloved of God. As we spend ourselves in service to God and neighbor, as we seek to build the kingdom of God here on earth, it is then that we will be tested – tested because we are living out our faith in the current of this world.

On Monday, as we sat and talked around a table in the Chapel, as we discussed this week's lectionary readings and shared our thoughts on living out our faith, this quote was shared: "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace." While Jimi Hendrix might not be your cup of tea, there is much truth in these words.



When love is what drives all that we say and do and think, when love is the foundation of who and what we are at our core, then our lives will know peace. As that ripples out from us, peace will flow into the lives of those that we meet, and, from there, the world will come to know peace – one small ripple after another small ripple.

As we close this time together, I end with a question formed from Paul's words offered in verse 8. At the end of the day and after each interaction that the world has with you, do those people or groups walk away thinking, "Boy, _____ really loved me so much that they shared all that they had with me!"?



Put your name in that blank and think about an interaction that you had with someone out there in the world. Put your name in that blank and think about a relationship that you have with someone outside of the church. After they have spent a little time with you, did they walk away thinking that you loved them so much that you gave your all to help them, to stand up for them, to care for them, to walk alongside them, to deepen that relationship with them? Did they come to know Christ's love through your love?

Let us pray… Lord, help us welcome you and all who come in your name. Give us a deep love for your living word and for all our brothers and sisters. Guide us, O God, by the power and presence of your Spirit, so that our walk of faith may be blameless and pure. Help us to always seek to please you rather than to desire the favor of others. Make us gentle and compassionate, humble and forgiving, just and holy in all our relationships. Help us to be like Christ in whom we believe. Help us to meditate on his words, teaching, and example day and night. Lord, help us to not only share the good news of your love with all we meet, but also to share our very selves. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

1) *Grow.* Think back to your most recent time of faith testing. What growth can you see from that experience? What would you do differently the next time around?
2) *Pray.* What sort of testing might you be about to go through? Seek God's guidance and direction as a way to prepare yourself.
3) *Study.* Read 1st Thessalonians 5:12-22 – "Paul's Final Advice." How do the times that God tests your faith help you when you are testing matters of faith (verse 20)?