

The apostle Paul traveled extensively as he carried the gospel from city to city, but he didn't stay long in most cities because persecution forced him to leave. Thessalonica was one of those briefly visited cities. After spending two or three weeks there during his second missionary journey, he encountered persecution and had to leave. However, in that brief time a number of residents turned from their sin and trusted in Christ as their Savior. Later Paul dispatched Timothy to Thessalonica to see how the new Christians were faring. When Timothy caught up with Paul in Corinth, he provided a glowing report of the Thessalonian believers' spiritual progress. They had grown spiritually by leaps and bounds. And it is safe to say they had become model believers.

1. THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS MODELED THE MOST NOBLE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES (1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-3).

Banding together in the city of around two hundred thousand residents, the Thessalonian Christians exhibited faith, love, and hope, the three great virtues extolled by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13. Their faith motivated them to roll up their sleeves and perform the work of the Lord. Theirs was the kind of faith the apostle James commended in James 2:18. Their love for Christ and one another caused them to toil to the point of exhaustion. Furthermore, under severe persecution, they maintained a steadfast hope. Apparently, when Paul was present, he had taught the blessed hope of the Rapture. Therefore, the believers hoped it would occur soon and deliver them from the persecution.

Who can deny that believers today need to embrace the example set by the Thessalonian Christians? Too few church members are willing to work, while the rest are willing to let the others work. A discouraged pastor commented, "The problem with my church is, when we need to move the piano, nearly everybody reaches for the stool." It has been said if you want to get rid of your pastor, tell him you want to work wherever there is a need. He will suffer a heart attack and will die on the spot. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul urged them to always abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that such labor is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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to the Lord. Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (John 14:23). Another test is love for one another (1 John 3:14). It was my privilege as a pastor to serve a church that demonstrated mutual love. No known need went unmet. If a widow’s house needed repairs, her fellow members would make them. If someone needed car repairs, members with mechanical ability would come to the rescue. Groceries were often supplied to needy families. No one said to a brother or sister in need, “The Lord loves you and so do I. I hope things get better.” The apostle John admonished, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

How hopeful are most believers today that the Rapture will occur in their lifetime? The Thessalonian believers lived with that blessed hope burning in their souls. We must not drive our stakes down too deeply into this world, because one day—perhaps today—we will be caught up to be with Christ.

2. THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS MODELED A VITAL RELATIONSHIP TO GOD’S WORD (1 THESSALONIANS 1:4–8).

When Paul and his coworkers declared God’s Word to the Thessalonians and demonstrated its power in their lives, the Thessalonians welcomed it with the joy of the Holy Spirit in spite of intense opposition (1 Thessalonians 1:4–6). When we open our hearts to God’s Word, the Holy Spirit pours His joy into them. Even bleak circumstances cannot block His joy. Paul wrote Philippians, his joy epistle, from a prison cell!

The joyful believers at Thessalonica lived the Word. Their lives reflected Christ to all the believers in Macedonia and even to those who lived in Achaia, the next province to the south (1:7). The inspired Word had become the illustrated Word in their lives. Our churches cannot have too many walking Bibles in their membership.

In addition, the Thessalonian Christians became missionaries. They spread the Word of the Lord to others (1:8). Their evangelistic spirit helps us become serious about the “go” in gospel.

3. THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS MODELED A TRANSFORMED LIFE (1 THESSALONIANS 1:9, 10)

Before becoming believers in Christ, the Thessalonians worshiped idols. When Christ entered their lives, they turned to God and rejected idolatry (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Undoubtedly, no Christian worships false gods of wood and stone, but Colossians 3:5 identifies covetousness as idolatry. If we follow the example of the Thessalonian believers, we will reject the tendency to practice idolatry. We will not covet material goods, fame, fortune, or power. We will have no room in our hearts for any false gods.

The believers at Thessalonica were serving the living and true God (1:9). The word “serve” in verse 9 suggests the kind of service a slave rendered to his master. Our wills should be swallowed up in the will of God so that we do what He wants us to do. Such service is logical, because our God is the only “living and true God.”

The Thessalonian believers were also waiting for God’s Son from Heaven (1:10). They set a good example for us by doing so. This world is not our final home. We will leave it behind quickly when Jesus comes to snatch us away to Heaven. Although we will not experience the Tribulation—“the wrath to come” (v. 10)—we dare not twiddle our thumbs. There is work to be done. There are souls to win.

The late evangelist Vance Havner told the story of a sleeping elderly couple whose grandfather clock began to chime. The sound woke up the husband. He counted the chimes: *one, two, three, four, five*. He continued to count: *six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen*. When the clock chimed *thirteen*, the startled husband jolted up and poked his wife in the ribs. “Get up, old gal!” he said. “It’s later now than it’s ever been before.”

Time is running down in our troubled world, and it is running out for us to be at our best for God. Will we redeem the time? Romans 13:11 delivers this challenge: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” ■

Dr. Jim Dyet, a frequent contributor to Horizons, maintains a busy preaching and writing ministry. He is a retired pastor living in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

