

SESSION 5

AUTHENTIC JOY

▶ **The Point**

Authentic joy flows from a relationship with Jesus.

▶ **The Passage**

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Between 1590 and 1613, William Shakespeare wrote close to forty plays that are still performed around the world. So in 1795, when William-Henry Ireland produced documents supposedly written by Shakespeare, the world took notice. Several experts authenticated the documents. When Ireland “found” a previously unknown Shakespearean play called *Vortigern and Rowena*, it was immediately put into production. But the first performance revealed a play so bad that fighting broke out and Ireland was revealed as a fraud.⁶

Ireland didn’t find these documents at all. He had cleverly aged parchment paper and learned to forge the handwriting of the famous playwright; eventually however, these works were seen for the forgeries they were. At some point, inauthenticity will always be revealed—even when it is in a Christian’s attitude. Most of us can be polite and friendly when we have to, but genuine joy calls for something deeper. People can detect the difference between a superficial “I’m glad to see you” and authentic joy. We cannot manufacture such genuine joy, but we will possess it when we’re consumed with the gospel and the love of Christ.

▶ **The Setting**

Paul wrote his first letter to the believers at Thessalonica in approximately AD 50, about eighteen years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. This makes 1 Thessalonians both one of the earliest of Paul’s letters and one of the earliest writings in the New Testament. As such, it provides one of the earliest glimpses of the first-century Christian community, with its emphasis on faith and love.

What does the Bible say?

Macedonia and Achaia

(v. 7)—When the Romans gained control of Greece, they divided it into two provinces. Macedonia was the northern and Achaia was the southern province. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 45 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What’s the best forgery, fake, or fraud you’ve seen or heard about?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to **“The Bible Meets Life”** on page 46 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of living out of genuine joy by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to **“The Point”** on page 46 of the PSG: **“Authentic joy flows from a relationship with Jesus.”**

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 5**, the “The Second Missionary Journey of Paul” poster, to help group members understand the setting for Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, prepare to show the video for Rend Collective’s “Joy” to help the group focus on this week’s topic. If you have someone in your group who enjoys leading worship, invite him or her to lead the group in singing along. Then lead the group in an opening prayer.

Note: A link to the video may be found at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to remind us of the many reasons we have for authentic joy. Thank Him for His sacrifice that made this joy possible.

Notes



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. ² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 on page 47 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the love and respect Paul had for the Thessalonian church.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 47 of the PSG: **“What do work, labor, and endurance have to do with faith, love, and hope?”**

RECAP: So great was Paul’s joy that he wrote the letter we know as 1 Thessalonians. In these first few verses, you can hear not only his relief but also the great joy Paul felt after hearing what was going on there.

His [Paul’s] confidence was not in the Thessalonians’ ability. They were just ordinary people, weak and fallible. No, his confidence was in the foundation of their work, labor, and endurance. Faith produced their work. Love motivated their labor. Hope inspired their endurance.

Because the foundation was sure, the outward actions would continue. It is important for us to remember that any outward signs of our faith—like joy, for example—are ultimately dependent on the firmness of our foundation.

TRANSITION: Faith and love are the driving forces in how Christians should live their lives. In the next verses, we see that joy flows from our salvation experience.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have your relationships with others inspired your faith in God?

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 Commentary

[Verse 1] Faith and love are the driving forces in how Christians should live their lives. In the opening section of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian believers, **Paul** introduced himself, as well as two of his associates: **Silvanus** (also known as Silas) and **Timothy**. That Silvanus and Timothy are included indicates their involvement with and their concern for the Thessalonian church.

The letter is addressed to **the church of the Thessalonians**. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and was one of the most important commercial centers in Greece.

The phrase **in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** distinguished the Thessalonian believers from other religious and secular groups and identified at the core who they were—believers in Christ.⁷ **The Father** emphasized both God's authority over and loving concern for the believers. The term **Christ** identified God's Messiah. The term **Lord** indicated Jesus Christ was the Master of the believers in Thessalonica. It is also equivalent to the term "God."

Paul's greeting combined both Greek (**grace**) and Jewish (**peace**) terminology. *Grace* reminded believers of God's gracious act of forgiving sins and accomplishing salvation through Jesus Christ. *Peace* does not necessarily denote the absence of conflict, but rather communicates the wholeness and the abundant blessings made available to the believer through salvation in Jesus Christ.

[Verses 2-3] Paul and his co-workers constantly gave thanks to God for the Thessalonian believers' loyalty to them and the gospel. Paul was thankful for three specific things in their prayers to **our God and Father**. The first was **your work of faith**. While salvation is by faith in Christ alone, true faith produces meaningful works as evidence of the believer's salvation. (See Eph. 2:8-10.) **Work** refers to daily tasks of labor, work done in one's occupation, business, and so forth.

The second thing was the Thessalonians' **labor of love**. Labor is a stronger term than "work" and refers to intense toil prompted by love. The term for **love** (*agape*) is used to describe God's very nature (see 1 John 4:16); the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross when He laid down His life for us (see 3:10), and the love God has for us as His adopted children. (See v. 1.) This same love resides in the believer and is to be expressed both vertically toward God and horizontally toward other people. (See 4:12,16.) It is through these labors of love that the Thessalonians showed themselves to be God's children and Jesus' disciples.

The third thing was the Thessalonians' **steadfastness of hope**. **Steadfastness** was used in connection with athletes and soldiers to describe their strength to both endure the assaults of their enemies and to strike back at the same to gain the victory. This endurance is linked to **hope**, the confident expectation and assurance of victory.

Paul described faith, hope, and love as the three Christian virtues, which remain. (See 1 Cor. 13:13.) These three actions of the Thessalonians and their corresponding virtues were accomplished **in our Lord Jesus Christ**. (See Eph. 2:10.)



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6 on page 48 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the assurance of salvation that is inherent in the gospel.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 48 of the PSG: “**What are some ways your life reflects the joy of the gospel?**”

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 49 of the PSG. Authentic joy that arises out of salvation in Christ has at least these three characteristics:

1. **Authentic joy does not wax and wane with circumstances.** Joy finds its source in God and in God alone.
2. **Authentic joy is more solid and stable than the rising sun.** Because joy comes from God, our unshakable Rock (see Ps. 18:2), we can know our true source of joy will never be shaken.
3. **Authentic joy is not found in immediate gratification but by pushing past it.** Everywhere we turn, the promise of happiness is held out for us, but joy is much deeper.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 49 of the PSG: “**How does demonstrating joy in difficult circumstances make a difference in the kingdom?**”

TRANSITION: The next verses show us that love and joy provide a compelling witness and example for others to follow.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you seen the power of the gospel displayed in someone's life?

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6 Commentary

[Verse 4] Joy flows from our salvation experience. Paul identified with the Thessalonians as **brothers**. Paul and the Thessalonians were part of God's family, those who are loved by God. God demonstrated this love by sending Jesus to suffer and die that they might be brought into God's family through repentance and faith in Christ.

Paul knew God had **chosen** the Thessalonians. Paul had witnessed their genuine faith, their changed lives, and their fervent ministry, and he knew that they were part of God's family. Their life and witness affirmed their position.

The Greek term for **chosen** is also often translated as "election." In the Christian context, the broadest sense of the word is that God in some way selects out of all humanity those who become a part of His family through faith in Christ. Throughout the history of the Christian church, there has been a lively and often heated debate about the specific details as to how the process of election works, particularly concerning the relationship between election and human free will. Unfortunately, there has been no resolution of the debate over the meaning of the term "election" that has been satisfactory to all those concerned. Interestingly, Paul did not attempt to explain the concept here.

[Verse 5] Paul's assurance of the Thessalonians' salvation was based on the **gospel**. The gospel is the good news of salvation that God has made available for sinful humanity through Christ's death on the cross.

Paul brought the gospel to the Thessalonians not only in **word**; it came with the transforming **power** of God. When the gospel is preached, God's power is unleashed through the work of the **Holy Spirit** for the salvation of people. The changed lives of those who respond to the gospel, by repenting and putting their faith in Christ, testify to the truth of the gospel. The greatest miracle of all is the miracle of a changed life in Christ. In fact, their changed lives due to the Holy Spirit's work gave them **full conviction** concerning their new life in Christ and their hope of eternal life in heaven.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians, **You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake**. The Thessalonians had the opportunity to see the examples of Paul and his friends.

[Verse 6] Having both the gospel of Christ and the examples of Paul and his fellow evangelists, the Thessalonians became **imitators** of both Paul and Christ. Ultimately, the Thessalonians were followers of Christ. However, they were also followers of Paul's example as he followed Christ. (See 1 Cor. 11:1.) In so doing, the Thessalonians were living lives pleasing to **the Lord** as disciples of Christ.

The Thessalonians had welcomed the gospel **in much affliction**. They suffered persecution from their fellow countrymen who opposed the spread of the gospel. (See 1 Thess. 2:14.) Coming to Christ also could have caused divisions among family members and alienation from friends. In spite of the persecution, the Thessalonians had **received the word** with **joy**. This joy proceeded from **the Holy Spirit**.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Dotted lines for taking notes.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10 on page 50 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 50 of the PSG. Here are some things we can remind ourselves of daily:

- ▶ **Remember what you deserve.** One of the great enemies of joy is entitlement.
- ▶ **Remember what you have.** Another enemy of joy is comparison.
- ▶ **Remember what was paid.** Jesus was given for our sake.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 50 of the PSG: **“How can the truths of these verses help our group be more welcoming?”**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What obstacles get in the way of our living with a sense of love and joy?



DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, “Authentic Joy,” on page 51 of the PSG to help them understand how genuine joy is produced in our lives.

Using the words listed, put a box around the actions Paul took toward the Thessalonians and a circle around the actions for which the Thessalonians were known: (Several words are used in the PSG). Now underline the actions that produce authentic joy in your life as you interact with other people for Christ.

How will these affect the way you live out your week?

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10 Commentary

[Verses 7-8] Love and joy provide a compelling witness and example for others to follow. The Thessalonians believers' lives were an **example** to all the believers in **Macedonia** and **Achaia**. In addition to being an example, the Thessalonians' reputation served as means by which the gospel was spread. **The word of the Lord** is a common Old Testament expression. It means that the word proclaimed was not man-made, but was from God. Through the Thessalonians' reputation as faithful believers, the gospel spread not only throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but everywhere Christians went with the gospel. Because word of their faith had spread far and wide, Paul wrote that he didn't need to say anything about it. Word about the Thessalonian believers was spreading on its own.

[Verse 9] Wherever Paul went, he heard word of what had taken place during his time among the Thessalonian believers. The Thessalonians had turned **to God from idols**. Idols are dead and powerless, representing false gods, and cannot lead to truth. In contrast to these idols, Jesus is **the living and true God**. The Thessalonians had turned to God in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

No longer enslaved to idols, these believers now served God. In contrast to believers who serve the one, true God, every lost person serves someone or something else, be it false gods or their own passions and desires—all of which ultimately can be labeled sin. (See Rom. 6:16.) But God alone deserves our worship and service. Paul repeatedly described himself as a slave (or servant) of Jesus Christ. (See Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1.) It's the way real believers live—as servants of Jesus.

[Verse 10] While serving God, the Thessalonians were **to wait** for Jesus' return at His second coming. While we wait, we are to be expectant of Jesus' return (see Matt. 24:36-44; 25:1-13), but at the same time patient (see 2 Pet. 3:8) and faithful to those tasks and roles we have been given by God. (See Matt. 25:14-30.) We are not to grow weary, become careless, or become indulgent in the pleasures of this world. (See 24:45-51.)

For his Son from heaven also refers to the second coming of Jesus. (See Rev. 19.) His coming will bring the world, as we know it to a close. **Whom he raised from the dead** recalls Jesus' resurrection. (See Acts 3:15; 13:30,37.) Jesus has conquered death, both for Himself and for those who place their faith in Him. (See 1 Cor. 15:12-22; 1 Thess. 4:13-14.)

Jesus not only has power over the grave, death, and hell (see Rev. 20:11-15), He also **delivers us from the wrath to come**—the final judgment. The word **wrath** speaks of God's abiding, absolute judgment against evil. The wrath of God is often an unpopular subject today, one that is either avoided or ignored even in many churches. But God's wrath against all evil shows that He takes sin very seriously, so seriously that He sent His Son into the world to ultimately pay the price for humanity's sins. The only deliverance (rescue) from God's wrath is through Jesus Christ, who took upon Himself both our sins and the just penalty of God's wrath for those sins at the cross. (See Col. 2:13-14.)



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 52 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications.



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Thank someone.** Who is one person in your life who lives with authentic joy? Write a note and thank that person for his or her example.
- ▶ **Grow in joy.** Take a hard look at the three suggestions for growing your joy (see page 49 of the PSG). Write them on index cards and place them in spots where you will see them on a daily basis.
- ▶ **Journal your thanks.** Because joy is linked with gratitude, begin a “thankful” journal. Each day for the next month write down something you are thankful for and watch your joy begin to grow.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 52 of the PSG:

Happiness and a plastic smile can be manufactured easily enough, but time and circumstances will reveal the phoniness behind it. Authentic joy, on the other hand, will shine through, for it is rooted in what God has done for us in Christ.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking God for the genuine joy that we can experience and express because of what He has done for us through Christ. Ask Him for opportunities to express that joy to others in tangible ways this week.



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