

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

A Church for Which to Be Grateful
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:13-14

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

You will want to have the picture of the abandoned church found on the final (p.20) page of this session to show to the group as you read the Gathering Time story.

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

If you choose to have different readers read the verses suggested in the Worship Time, then copy and cut apart those verses as found on the next to final page of this session (p.19). Hand them out in time for the readers to practice reading them with emphasis.

Music Sources:

I Give You My Heart, *The Worship Hymnal*, 2008, #528, CCLI # 1866132

We Are An Offering, *The Worship Hymnal*, 2008, #547, CCLI # 16220

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

A Church for Which to Be Grateful

Focal Text

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:13-14

Background Text

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:13-20; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Main Idea

A church for which to be grateful shows its faithfulness to the gospel through demonstrating its faith, hope, and love.

Question to Explore

What about your church makes you grateful?

Teaching Aim

To help the church identify marks of a church for which to be grateful and evaluate how well your church leads them to live and express faith, hope, and love.

Gathering together:

Sing “I Give You My Heart”

First thoughts:

Leader: Show the photo of the abandoned church building found on the final page (p.20) to the gathered church.

Now read this story to the group:

From these windows, photos were taken of the inside of this abandoned church building. They are strange pictures. Certainly, there is no beauty in them. Yet the pictures taken of the inside of the building through the windows of the abandoned church bring a certain satisfaction to their owner. This small church was abandoned many years ago when the school in the little town of Grenville, New Mexico, USA, was consolidated into a larger school and the small town began to die. Yet it was the birth

place of faith for quite a number of children. A dedicated Sunday School teacher created interesting lessons and made meaningful application of Biblical truth for the handful of children in her care. A pastor came occasionally – never more than once a month. Yet this church was one for which those children – now grown to late adulthood – are grateful.

In this day of bigger is better, it is good to think about what makes a church great. Studies in the book of Thessalonians will guide our thoughts about this topic. The main idea for today's study is "A church for which to be grateful shows its faithfulness to the gospel through demonstrating its faith, hope, and love." We are asked to answer this question "What about your church makes you grateful?"

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

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Introduction to your personal study:

Churches today face the reality that people move from church to church for a variety of reasons. The church’s perceived failure to provide children’s or youth programming; dissatisfaction with the music sung; a slight given by a church leader or the pastor all are reasons for looking for a church which may prove more satisfactory.

Today’s emphasis on what makes us grateful about our church may help provide an antidote to the prevalent emphasis on looking for what pleases us in a church situation. What are essentials for a church that is a blessing and what is essential about an individual’s attitude if he/she is to receive the blessing the church can be.

Many years ago Paul preached in Thessalonica and people understood and accepted Christ as Saviour. But Paul could not stay to teach and disciple that group of people.

His letters to them were helpful then and can be helpful to us all these centuries later if we study and listen with an open heart.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series of Bible Study and Worship sessions (Bible Teaching #.....). The person who downloaded this session should have that material for you, as well.

The two New Testament letters to the Christians at Thessalonica reveal the pastoral heart of Paul the missionary. He and the missionary leadership team had established the church at Thessalonica in the Roman province of Macedonia, the same province as Philippi, near the midpoint of the first century AD (see Acts 17:1-9). According to Acts, after spending only a brief time there, the leadership team had left the city and continued the missionary efforts in Berea, Athens, and Corinth. Out of pastoral concern for the Thessalonian Christians and a desire to provide them further instructions on some questions they had, Paul wrote back to them.

First Thessalonians is the oldest letter of Paul, having been written about 50 AD. Mark, the first of the four gospels to be written down, likely did not appear until the mid 60s. It is possible that the Book of James is the oldest New Testament book, perhaps written as early as 48 AD, but it is also possible that 1 Thessalonians itself is the very earliest New Testament book to have been written. (Phillippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Copyright 2002 by BAPTISTWAY PRESS. Used by permission.)

In Acts 17:1-9 we read the story of brief ministry of Paul in Thessalonica. On three Sabbath days, he explained the Scriptures to them and told them that Christ had to suffer and to rise from the dead. Then he said, “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.” Some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks including several prominent women believed Paul’s message.

The Jewish leadership was jealous of Paul’s success and rounded up bad characters from the market to start a riot. A man named Jason had welcomed Paul and Silas into his home and was held responsible for their behaviour. A bond was posted and during the night, Paul and Silas were sent away to Berea.

Paul, therefore, felt that additional teaching was needed for the people of Thessalonica.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Paul writes in the plural—Paul, Silas and Timothy. All of these men were concerned for the well-being of the church in Thessalonica. This church is the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Even this salutation tells us of the character of a healthy church – it belongs to the people in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Often, a church is identified as belonging to the pastor – that’s

Bro. Smith's church or Pastor Jones' church. While that may be helpful in human terms, it easily leads to a misunderstanding about who is in charge of the church and who takes credit for the good that the church is doing. It is easy also for members of the church to take undue ownership based on length of time in the church or family history in the church or money given to the church.

Paul reminds us in the first verse of his letter to the Thessalonians that this church belongs to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Would it make a difference in how we talk about our church, how we criticize it, how we pray for it, and how we love it if we really believed that it belonged to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ?

In verse 2, Paul thanks God for all of the members of the church. He assures them of his prayers of thanksgiving. He is specific in what he is thankful for: your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul early on describes elements of a church for which to be thankful. There is work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope.

Three couples recently had dinner in the home of one of the couples. Although they do not live far from one another, their busy schedules make it difficult to see each other often. Years ago, the three couples were part of a new church start. They shared in the work produced by faith and labor prompted by love. That meant the pure physical labor of building a building, the extra hours spent in child care and teaching, the picking up and putting away of hymnals, classroom supplies and refreshments. They taught and loved one another's children and rejoice today to see those children loving and serving the Lord. They endured some hard times together. Faith, love, and hope were elements of their relationship in that church and those elements bind them together today. It was not a perfect church, but it was one for which each couple is deeply grateful.

Paul reminds the brothers loved by God that they were chosen by God. They were convicted of Christ's death on their behalf not only by words but by the power of the Holy Spirit. That power led to joy given by the Holy Spirit even in spite of severe sufferings.

Paul commends the believers for becoming a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia and beyond. The believers in Thessalonica turned from idols to serve the living and true God (v. 9).

A church for which one can be thankful is one whose witness extends beyond itself and is a model for others – a model of faith, love, and hope.

In the early verses of chapter 2 Paul explains that the message he preached was preached with pure motives. ***“We (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel (2:4)”***. We know only too well that in today’s world people are sceptical of preachers of religious ideas. Apparently, that was true in Paul’s time as well. He spoke of those who try to please men, who use flattery, whose underlying motive is greed and who seek praise. These people exist in our world today. And if we are not careful to remember that our church belongs to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, these motivations may be ours as well.

Paul speaks of how dear the people of Thessalonica had become to him and his associates and how they had lovingly encouraged, comforted and admonished them even as parent would love and encourage their children.

In verses 13-14 of chapter 2, Paul reiterates what he has already said. ***“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those church suffered from the Jews.”***

We are drawn to God and able to accept salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit (chapter 1:4). That same Holy Spirit leads us to join a group of fellow believers to worship together, serve one another, witness to the lost who are in our circle of influence, and provide that the gospel is carried to the ends of the earth. We should prayerfully consider what local body God would have us to join. And, once we have made that decision, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we should not leave that body of believers – that family of God – until the Holy Spirit leads us into a different arena of service.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

As we think of things which make us grateful for our church, we must realize that the church is not like other institutions or activities in which we may participate. We can chose to change our favourite grocery store, recreational activity, medical doctor or school which our children attend. The church, however, is not like these other important parts of our life. The church, even the local church, belongs to God.

Your task as the leader of this Bible study will be to help your group to understand the importance of your church—to accept that fact and lead out in your church, regardless of its size or situation.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this session bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

A Church for Which to Be Grateful

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:13-14

Background Text

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:13-20; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Main Idea

A church for which to be grateful shows its faithfulness to the gospel through demonstrating its faith, hope, and love.

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Connect with Life:

Begin by reading this story: As the writer prepares this study, she thinks of a good friend who is retiring this week from a vice-presidency of a major oil company in the city where she lives. Several years ago when this man was transferred to this city, he looked for a church before he looked for a house to buy. He visited a newly established church which had great enthusiasm for winning the lost in their community and ministering to one another. He immediately felt the Holy Spirit saying to him, "This is your church. This is the reason I have brought you to this city and this job." When the demands of his job increased, he did not forget that his main purpose in being in the city

was to serve God through this particular church. He had various positions of influence, but he also had many ministries of service. He sometimes preached when the pastor was away; he often cleaned the kitchen at the end of Sunday fellowship. He faithfully taught his Sunday School class and he took the son of a single mom skiing. His retirement is for him the beginning of freedom to serve God more fully. He could never leave his church on a whim; he could only leave under the direction of the Holy Spirit saying, "Go, your work here is finished". He is grateful for his church and his church is grateful for him.

Guide the Study:

Have someone read the entire focal scripture which is 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10 and 2:13-14. (You may want to have it read in more than one translation).

Now have Acts 17:1-9 read aloud.

Encourage a discussion with the group on each of these questions:

How did the church in Thessalonica began.

How long was Paul with the church?

Why did Paul feel the need to write words of advice to the church?

Ask a member to read through verse 3 and list the three elements for which Paul gave thanks to God about this church. (Write these on a white board or large sheet of paper, is possible).

Ask another member to read verse 4.

Seek an answer: What is the notable aspect of this verse? (We are loved by God and chosen by Him).

Discuss with the group how that is still true for believers today.

Read verse 5

Now look for ideas on this: How do we come to be able to believe in God?

Open a discussion: What does that mean for us as we share with other people and long for them to come to faith?

Have the group read verses 6-8 silently and then answer the following questions:

How did the Thessalonians live out their faith?

Did they suffer any?

Did they have influence on others?

What do they say about the Thessalonians in other places? (Verse 9 – they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God).

Have a member read Chapter 2: 13 and 14.

Ask: What does Paul say happens when we hear and believe the word of God? (The word of God is at work in you who believe).

Follow with this: What are specific ways in which we have experienced this reality?

Add: Is it something only for new believers?

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the session by and for themselves.

Hand out slips of paper and ask class members to write something about your church for which they are grateful. They may list more than one thing.

Collect the slips of paper and ask the group to bow in prayer. Reverently read the slips of paper as a prayer of thanksgiving.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

A Church for Which to Be Grateful 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:13-14

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Collect a number of pictures of churches. Be sure to include some large and ornate church buildings. Have each youth discuss one or more of the pictures following these questions?

What would it be like to worship in such a building?

What activities or programs could you have in such a building?

How much would it cost to heat and cool such a building?

Why do we believe that a church is not the building?

What are things about your home church for which you are grateful?

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***A Church for Which to Be Grateful*****1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:13-14****Beginning the Service:**

Sing "I Give You My Heart" and "We Are An Offering"

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

There are only a few believers among the Nafusa Berbers living in the southern desert region of North Africa. Ask God to guide believers as they seek effective ways to reach these Berbers and to plant churches among them. Ask God to send Spirit-filled laborers who are persistent, innovative, and flexible into these harvest fields.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Lift Up Your Hands in the Sanctuary

Sanctuary is a word which paints a picture. It brings peace to our heart even to say the word. It contains within it the idea of escape from pursuing enemies or daily fret and toil. Many of us may picture a wooded area, green trees, a beautiful garden, or a holy worship place. It has become a popular name for contemporary churches who wish to portray a non-judgmental, welcoming atmosphere to a community who may be suspicious of more traditional approaches to church life.

After our study of the church today which led us to consider the church in Thessalonica for which Paul expressed his thankfulness, we will consider our church in terms of sanctuary. (You may choose to have the following scriptures read by three different people)

Psalm 134

**Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord
Who minister by night in the house of the Lord.
Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord.
May the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.**

Psalm 33: 20-22

**We wait in hope for the Lord;
He is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice.
For we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord,
Even as we put our hope in you.**

Psalms 84: 1, 2

**How lovely is Your dwelling place, Lord of Hosts.
I long and yearn for the courts of the Lord;
My heart and flesh cry out for the living God.**

The idea of the dwelling place of God had a prominent place in Jewish history and worship. In the years of wandering in the wilderness, the Ark of the Covenant was thought to contain the very presence of God. In later years, the temple in Jerusalem was visited by faithful Jews with joy. The Holy of Holies was entered only once a year by the high priest who made sacrifice for the sins of the people in the very presence of God.

David's psalms certainly contain these ideas of worship and yet seem to go beyond that to the exuberant worship of one who encountered God and worshipped him in a variety of places. We can picture a young David herding his sheep and flinging out his arms in the green valley or hilltop and crying "How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord of Hosts." In times of temptation and remorse for sin he must have cried "***I long and yearn for the courts of the Lord; My heart and flesh cry out for the living God.***"

That is our cry today. "***I long and yearn for the courts of the Lord; My heart and flesh cry out for the living God.***" We can find Him in many places, but we ought always to encounter him as we gather together with fellow believers in worship.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians he said, ***“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

As we meet together as believers we thank the Lord for work produced by faith. In this week that may have included preparation to teach/lead the Bible study and worship. In the home church, that is shared work – we each take our turn. We act in faith that God will equip us to lead others to understand Biblical truth. It is a labor prompted by love – love for one another and for God.

We may have stepped out this week by faith and in love to invite a friend to join us in study or we may actually have had a personal witness to someone with whom we work or know socially.

We may have had the opportunity to minister at a sick bed or to comfort one who has lost a spouse or a child or a friend to death.

We stay with the work and the labor because our endurance is inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Church work of any kind can be discouraging, but home churches have their own kind of discouragement. A family moves and attendance drops by a third. There is illness and nobody can make it on a given Sunday. Vacation plans are put on hold because of the knowledge that the church will suffer without one’s presence and contribution. Endurance inspired by hope keeps us going – someday there will be more of us; the impact we’ve had on an individual life is immeasurable.

A participant in a home church wrote in the guest book, “home church is comforting”. That person found sanctuary for a while from the doubts of her life and the pressures of living without faith. We will only know in eternity how deeply the experiences of those months changed her life. But we have hope that the truth she heard proclaimed each week will bring fruit.

Sanctuary – a place of comfort where faith, love and hope are lived out and expressed. It may be a physical place or an inner place, but God is there. Psalm 134 says:

***Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord
Who minister by night in the house of the Lord.
Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord.
May the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth,
Bless you from Zion.***

Call to Commitment:

We are those servants of the Lord; we minister by night and by day in the workplace, in the home, on the school ground. We lift up our hands in the sanctuary of the place where we meet God and wait for the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth to bless us.

May it be so, Lord Jesus.

Concluding the Service:

If you have had the scriptures read by three different people, conclude the service with a rereading of the scripture.

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Psalm 33: 20-22

***We wait in hope for the Lord;
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In him our hearts rejoice.
For we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord,
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+++++(Cut here)+++++

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