

## VISIBLE FOR GOD

**BIBLE BASIS:** I Thessalonians 1

**BIBLE TRUTH:** Jesus wants our lives to be an example to the world despite the suffering and hardships we might endure.

**MEMORY VERSE:** And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost (I Thessalonians 1:6).

**LESSON AIM:** That your students will identify an opportunity to be more intentional in living out their commitment to Christ.

**LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON:** To have complete confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to help in times of trouble.

**BIBLE LEARNING:** Recognizing how the Thessalonian church's commitment to God was visible in their relationship to others.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

#### BIBLE APPLICATION

Our commitment to God should prompt us to share the message of the Gospel with others.

#### STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Your students will believe they can live out their Christian commitment every day.

#### LESSON

I THESSALONIANS 1

#### SCRIPTURE

*1. Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*2. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;*

*3. Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope*

*in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;*

*4. Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*

*5. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*

*6. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:*

*7. So that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.*

*8. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.*

*9. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye 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, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

## **LIGHT ON THE WORD**

At the start of today's lesson, the church at Thessalonica was in its infancy. It had been established only two or three years before Paul wrote this letter. These new Christians were struggling with their faith, and there was still much that they did not understand about their walk with God. For example, the Thessalonian believers were unclear concerning Christ's second coming. Some felt that Christ would return immediately and were confused when their loved ones died before He did so. To add to their dilemma, members of the first century church were being persecuted mightily. Many believers were killed by those who hated Christ. These Christians, therefore, were facing extreme sacrifices for their belief.

Paul wrote this letter to encourage these young believers. He wrote to assure them of his love. He also wanted to praise them for their faithfulness in spite of their circumstances, and to remind them of their hope in Christ. Paul assured them that their Lord and Saviour would return.

## **TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON**

### **LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON**

**AIM:** That your students will understand the danger Paul and others faced while trying to spread the message of Christ's love.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***Newfound Faith***

The city of Thessalonica had formerly been the hub of Macedonia—its capital, and the largest city of this Roman province. After God directed Paul to preach the Gospel there during his second missionary journey, he established the church in Thessalonica, one of the wealthiest and most flourishing trade centers of the Roman Empire. This was approximately A.D. 51. The apostle and his companions planted the church, comprised of converted Jews and Gentiles, but they had to leave in a hurry because their lives were threatened (Acts 17:1-9). Thus, they had very little chance to instruct these new converts; the challenge was all the greater because this new church had to contend with the gamut of pagan religions and cultural influences thriving in their city which tested their new-found faith in the Living God.

## **BIBLE LEARNING**

**AIM:** That your students will understand how

Paul and Silas brought the Gospel to Thessalonica.

### **I. PAUL AND SILAS BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS (I Thessalonians 1:1-3)**

Paul sent Timothy back to see how the Thessalonians were doing. Timothy brought back the good news that they were following the Lord; still, they had many questions. So Paul wrote this letter to answer their questions and commend the Thessalonians for their faithfulness.

Paul Writes to the Thessalonians (verses 1-3)

*1. Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the*

*Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul addressed these questions in this letter, he greeted the Thessalonian believers with encouraging words, acknowledging Timothy's report that they were "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 1). The word "in" in the Greek is *en* and means "primary position denoting a (fixed) position in place, time, or state of mind." In essence, Paul assured them that they were indeed children of the Most High God; they belonged to Him—they were in His family—joint heirs with Jesus. Because they had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they were also "fixed" in Him and nothing and no one could pluck them out. Paul ended his greeting by proclaiming God's grace and peace for their lives. "Grace" in the Greek (*charis*, KHAR- ece), means "good-will, favor." "Peace" in the Greek is *eirene* (i-RAY-nay), and means "quietness, rest." In other words, Paul spoke about God's grace and rest in their lives. He knew that only God could give them what they needed (sense of belonging, favor, and rest) for the spiritual battles that they had to fight.

*2, 3. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;*

Paul gave further encouragement by assuring these Thessalonians that the other saints were praying for them.

To further encourage, Paul acknowledged Thessalonians' "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus

Christ" (verse 3). The word "work" in the Greek (*ergon*, ER-gon), means "labor, effort, business, employment." The phrase "of faith" (Greek, *pistis*, PIS-tis), means "assurance, belief, moral conviction; suggests the belief that God exists and He is the creator and ruler of all things." In the Greek "of love" is *agape* (ag-AH-pay), and means "godly love, affection, goodwill, benevolence." The Greek word for "patience" is *hupomone* (hoop-om-on-AY), and means "endurance, constancy, steadfastness." In summation, Paul lifted these infants-in-Christ up by commending them on their faithful labor for the Lord, all the loving deeds that they had carried out in His name, and their endurance and consistency in both the faith and in anticipating the Lord's second coming. He reminded them that the Lord saw their efforts—all that they had done did not go unnoticed by God.

#### **QUESTION 1**

*What difficulties did new believers have in Thessalonica?*

(Answer) The new Christians in Thessalonica were struggling with their newfound faith. Persecutions against them by the established order were fierce. The Thessalonian believers had many unanswered questions as they struggled to hold on to their beliefs and waited for Christ's return.

#### **LIGHT ON THE WORD**

##### **Establishing the Church in Thessalonica**

Two or three years after this church was established, these believers, still young in their faith, suffered extreme persecution because of their beliefs. The disputes were more than verbal ones. Some of them even met early death. Consequently, Paul wrote this letter with

a twofold purpose: (1) He wanted to strengthen them in their faith; and (2) he wanted to encourage the Thessalonians by giving them the assurance of the Second Coming (Life Application Study Bible, 2395). In essence, the apostle Paul wanted to remind them that their hope was in Jesus Christ, their Lord and Savior. Also because some of these Christians thought that Jesus would return immediately, they were confused when their loved ones died and He had not yet come. Thus, Paul wanted to clear up the confusion. Matthew Henry stated, "This epistle to the church of Christ at Thessalonica, which, though it is placed after the other epistles of the apostle, is supposed to be first in time of all Paul's epistles" (Commentary on the Whole Bible, 1876).

## **II. ELECTION—GOD CHOOSES (I Thessalonians 1:4-8)**

Paul reminded the Thessalonians of how the Good News came to them with power, and how God's Holy Spirit did a work in them and changed their lives. As a result, they had become true followers of Christ.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were also living epistles to the Thessalonians because their lives embodied what they preached. They were doers of God's Word, which is important for all new Christians to see. The Thessalonian believers accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour under much persecution. This is the suffering ("affliction," KJV) Paul mentioned in verse 6.

### **Election (verses 4-8)**

*4, 5. Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what*

*manner of men we were among you for your sake.*

Paul also reminded these fellow believers about God's "election" of them. "Election" in the Greek is ekloge (ek-log-AY), and means "divine selection, also, the act of picking out, choosing." This can include God's knowledge of what a person will do of his or her own accord, freely. Thus, these Thessalonians were chosen—divinely selected by a Divine Being (Deity)—God, Himself, who loved them and accepted them into His family. And because they were chosen by Almighty God, the Good News did not come to them "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost" (verse 5). The Greek word for "power" (dunamis, DOO-nam-is), means "force, might, strength, ability, inherent power."

The Holy Ghost also gave them the assurance that Paul's message was true—the Good News of Salvation was true. Plus, this same Holy Spirit would not only help them to remain strong in their new faith, but also He would help them to maintain their moral character and show unconditional love toward one another; even as they underwent persecution.

*6-8. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.*

Not only had Paul and his companions been an example of holy living to the believers at Thessalonica, but after the Thessalonians followed in the faith, these new believers were

able to become examples or witnesses for the faith to "all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia"—Greece and beyond (verse 7). In other words, in the midst of their afflictions and suffering, they imitated Paul and his companions and also the Lord. They planted seeds of faith that extended past Greece. Paul admitted to them that wherever he went, he found people telling him about the faith of the Thessalonians: They bore fruit for God that pleased both Paul and God.

## QUESTION 2

*How did these Christians (the Thessalonians) receive the Gospel message (see I Thessalonians 1:6)?*

(Answer) They became followers of Christ and received the message of the Gospel with joy from the Holy Ghost—despite the severe suffering that they had endured. They were imitators of Christ because they remained faithful—receiving the Gospel in the face of hard trials.

## LIGHT ON THE WORD

### Responding to the Gospel

In verses 9 and 10, Paul recognized and applauded the Thessalonians for their response to the Good News of salvation. They heard it, believed, and turned from idol worship and sin to serve God and look forward to the return of Jesus Christ.

### III. WHO SHOULD WE SERVE? (I Thessalonians 1:9-10)

Paul emphasized Christ's second coming in verse 10 and throughout I Thessalonians. Because of their persecution, Paul encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that

Jesus would bring with His second coming. This gave these new believers hope. It should also give Christians today that same hope. Some wrongs will not be made right until Christ comes. Therefore, we should serve the True and Living God.

### Serve the True and Living God (verses 9-10)

*9. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;*

The church at Thessalonica's testimony was that they had turned away from idols and had turned to the One, True, and Living God. Not only did they turn away from their sin to God, but they faithfully and tenaciously served God, and then looked forward to His second coming (they believed His Word). We, too, should follow the example of Paul, his companions, and the Thessalonians. We, too, should turn away from our sins to a Holy (set apart from sin) God. We should encourage each other's faith, lifting up one another's efforts on behalf of God. We should be fervent in our service to Him, winning other souls to Christ—help make disciples and show them how to live for Christ. Finally, we should look forward to the Second Coming and live life as though that coming could be any day. We do not know the day or the hour, but we do know that we must be ready when He comes.

*10. And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

Paul was sure of Christ's second coming and he did not deviate from teaching this Word. Due to the fact that the Thessalonians were being persecuted and even some killed, Paul

encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that would be found in Jesus Christ, writing that believers should "wait for his (God's) Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead." There is no other One that can deliver us from the wrath of God that is to come. The word "wrath" (Greek, orge, OR- gay), means "the act of chastising or disciplining, imposing a penalty for an offense." Make no mistake, He will punish sin. As believers, then, our hope is in die Second Coming, when He will return to reign in the new Earth forever and ever with His church. John in his revelation on the Isle of Patmos saw that Jesus would make all things new.

Like the Thessalonians, whose commitment to God was visible in their relationship to others, all believers should know and appreciate that our example is a witness to the world as well. The fact that our lives are visible to the

Living God should give every believer hope in Christ, who promised us eternal life and does not lie.

### **QUESTION 3**

What impact did the Gospel have on the Thessalonians (see I Thessalonians 1:9-10).

(Answer) The Thessalonians turned away from their idols to serve the true and living God. They believed that Christ had been raised from the dead and rejoices at the thought of Christ's return.

### **STUDENTS' RESPONSES**

AIM: That your students will believe they can live out their Christian commitment every day.

Pray that God will mature you in the faith, and that He will help you to stand firm and remain

faithful to Him regardless of your circumstances. Pray that leaders in the church will always be good examples in the faith, believing in and standing on God's Word. Make some plans to be a witness to at least one person this week. How can you witness through your actions? Prepare what you can say as a verbal witness. As in the words of I Peter 3:15 (KJV), "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Rehearse in class today a simple outline for telling others how to be saved: A — ask Jesus to forgive your sins; B — believe Jesus died on the Cross to take the punishment for your sins; and C - call on Jesus to save you.

### **PRAYER**

O Merciful God, help us to remember how You gave to us extravagantly out of Your love for us: You sent Your one and only Son to die on a cruel Cross for us. Help us to give

extravagantly out of our love for You by showing others that Jesus is in us. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

### **HOW TO SAY IT:**

Achaia. uh-KAY-yuh.

Macedonia. mas'uh-DOH-nee-uh;

mas'uh-DOH-nee-uhn.

Silvanus. sil-VAY-nuhs.

### **PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY**

Read I Thessalonians 2:1-12 and learn what is "Pleasing to God."

### **COMMENTS / NOTES:**

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

God Sees All (Ezekiel 14:1-8)

TUESDAY

A Purified People (Titus 2:11-15)

WEDNESDAY

Faith and Convictions (Romans 14:22-23)

THURSDAY

Imitators of Christ (I Corinthians 10:23—11:1)

FRIDAY

The Outcomes of Faith (Hebrews 13:1-7)

SATURDAY

Following Christ's Example (John 13:3-15)

SUNDAY

An Exemplary Faith (I Thessalonians 1)