

1 THESSALONIANS

LIVING FOR JESUS

INTRODUCTION

Becoming a Christian is the beginning of a whole new relationship.

There are lots of wonderful things about becoming a Christian. We come to know God as our loving heavenly Father. We have a new family on earth, made up of all our Christian brothers and sisters. We have forgiveness for all our rebellion against God – for everything that is wrong in our lives, everything that separates us from Him. We need not fear death any more. We know the truth about life, death, God and what we are here for.

Jesus Christ died to make all this possible. He died in our place to take the punishment we deserve. And now Jesus calls us to trust Him and live under His loving rule. To become a Christian is to come to see who Jesus is and why He came, and to begin to trust and obey Him.

At the heart of all that happens when we become Christians is the wonder of being given a new relationship with the God who made us. God adopts us into His own family as His dearly loved children. Now we can call the creator of the whole universe our Father. God sends His Spirit to live in our hearts. His Spirit assures us that we are now in God's family. He helps us to live in a way that pleases our heavenly Father.

How are we going to live in this new relationship? How will we know what pleases our Father? How can we learn to listen to Him?

Communication is vital in any relationship, and no less in our new relationship with God. God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. That is why reading the Bible is such a vital part of keeping going and growing in the Christian life. As we read the Bible we are reading God's words. The Bible is God speaking to us.

This booklet will help you read through one short book of the Bible in thirty days.

Each day's notes include some questions. You will find the answers in the part of the Bible we are looking at that day. There is a space in the notes for you to write your answers if you would like to. Sometimes you will find an extra section to read if you wish. These extra sections explain a bit more about something mentioned in the day's reading.

Reading the Bible is not an end in itself. We read the Bible so we can get to know God better and come to love Him more. We need to listen to His voice so we can learn what will please Him.

God speaks to us through His Word. How should we respond? We need to respond by talking to God about what we hear. We also need to take action to change. Ask God to help you as you read each day, and talk to Him about what you are learning. You will find some suggestions for prayer at the end of each day's notes.

The Bible book we are going to read is a letter written about twenty years after Jesus' death and resurrection. It was written to a group of new Christians. They lived in Greece in a city called Thessalonica. They had heard the message about Jesus, and had decided to follow Him. Perhaps you too are new to following Jesus.

Paul and his friend Silas (who is sometimes called Silvanus) had brought the message about Jesus to Thessalonica. Then Paul and Silas had had to leave. A short time later, this letter arrived in Thessalonica.

- ***Have a look at the first verse. Who was writing this letter?***

- ***Who were they writing to?***

- ***What does this verse tell us about where these Christians lived?***

So, Paul and his co-workers were writing to these new Christians. As we read on, we will see that they wanted to encourage these new believers to keep

going in the Christian life. They also wanted to reassure them in the face of the doubts and difficulties that had come their way.

- ***What is that little word 'in' telling us?***

Paul, Silas and Timothy are writing to 'the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. That little word 'in' tells us something very important about what happens when you become a Christian.

It tells us that when you become a Christian, you become someone who lives in two places. This gathering of Christians ('church' just means gathering) were Thessalonians; they lived in Thessalonica. But whether you live in Thessalonica or Tewkesbury or Tennessee, if you are a Christian you also live somewhere else. You also live 'in God the Father and the Lord Jesus'.

What does that mean? It means that you are now as close to God as it is possible to get. Wherever you are – on the bus, in the kitchen, at work, wherever – you are close to God and secure in Him, whatever else happens to you. You are united to God in a way that nothing can destroy.

That's a great thought to take with you into your day and to thank God for.

- ***What did Paul and his co-workers want for this church?***

Because of what Jesus had done for them on the cross, God's grace had come to these Thessalonians. They, like every Christian, had received God's free forgiveness for all their sins, all their rebellion against God. So now they were at peace with Him. We too share this wonderful experience. God is no longer distant from us. He is right there with us, all the time, and will be every day. Forever.

Paul and his friends wanted these new believers in Thessalonica to keep going as Christians. He wanted them to keep

enjoying grace from God and peace with God, and peace with each other too. This letter would encourage them to do just that. Pray that this letter would help you, too, to keep living in the grace and peace of God.

PRAY

- ***Thank God that you now live 'in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'.***
- ***Thank God that you have experienced God's grace through trusting Jesus.***
- ***Pray that this letter would help you to keep knowing God's grace and peace.***

A WORD ABOUT CHURCH

This letter was written to a church. The word 'church' in the Bible never refers to a physical building. It always means a gathering of Christians. God's plan is that everyone who follows Jesus should be part of a local gathering of believers.

When God adopts us into His family, He brings us into a whole range of new relationships. We come to know God as our heavenly Father. We also find that every other believer is in this family with us. They are our spiritual brothers and sisters. We need their love, support and encouragement, and they need ours. Following Jesus is not something God wants us to do on our own.

It may be that you haven't joined a local church fellowship yet. How should you choose which one to join?

Becoming a Christian means that you now trust Jesus as your Saviour and want to follow Him as your Lord. So you will need to know what He wants you to do. The way we do that is by listening very carefully to His Word, the Bible. So, find a church which is teaching the Bible. When you visit, see what happens in the sermon or talk. Does the preacher or teacher carefully explain what is in the Bible? Is the congregation encouraged to open a Bible during the sermon or talk and look at it carefully? If they are, that is a very good sign!

You also want to find a church which welcomes and supports you, and where you can serve others. Is there a Bible study group you can join? That will be a very helpful way of learning and getting to know a small group of Christians really well.

Lastly, find a church where you would be happy to bring someone who is not yet a Christian. We want those we know to find out about Jesus too. Is the good news about Jesus as Saviour and Lord clearly explained at the church? Is it a place which is easy to come to? If you find what goes on at the church embarrassing, strange or off-putting, probably your friend would too.

Choose your church with care. Make meeting with your church family a priority. Don't miss out on being there to hear God's Word explained, and to encourage each other. You need them, and they need you. God doesn't want you to be on your own.

Just before we read on in our letter, let's see what we can find out about these new Christians in Thessalonica. After all, this is a personal letter which was written to them in the first place. Knowing about them and their situation will help us understand the letter better.

Other parts of the Bible often help us understand the particular part we are reading. Another book in the Bible called Acts tells us how some of the first churches began. So reading Acts can often help us understand the letters which were written to these churches later on. That is certainly true of the church in Thessalonica. Today we read the account from the book of Acts of how the message about Jesus first came to Thessalonica.

• ***What happened during Paul's visit to Thessalonica?***

Paul and his friends arrived in the city. They went to the Jewish synagogue and started speaking about Jesus Christ. They went there on three different weeks to do this. Some people wanted to become Christians. Others were furious. As a result, Paul's opponents caused a riot in the city. Some of these new Christians had a terrible time. Paul and Silas had to leave town under cover of night. The Christians encouraged

them to go, seemingly for Paul and Silas' own safety.

• ***What did Paul do when he was in the synagogue in Thessalonica? (Look carefully at the words used to describe what Paul did.)***

He 'reasoned... from the Scriptures', 'explaining', 'proving', 'proclaiming', and 'persuaded'.

Words, words, words.

If you had been watching Paul, you would have seen him doing a lot of talking – lots of words coming out of his mouth.

• ***What was the heart of his message?***

Paul was telling them about Jesus' death and resurrection. He was explaining and proving that Jesus' resurrection showed that Jesus was God's chosen King (that is what 'Christ' means) (v.3).

• ***What was the result of all this reasoning and explaining?***

The message about Jesus always divides people. We can see that here in Thessalonica. There were two responses to what Paul said about Jesus:

1. Some were persuaded by his words and joined Paul (v.4). That is how people become Christians. You hear someone speaking words – words about Jesus. You hear someone explain that Jesus is Saviour and Jesus is Lord. In one sense it seems very ordinary, just words.

But what is going on when people speak about Jesus is far from ordinary. We will see that as we read Paul's letter. Words about Jesus have the power to transform lives. Words about Jesus can bring people rescue from God's judgement. But we need to respond to these words in the right way. In Thessalonica, some people did just that. Some people accepted Paul's message, and they became Christians too.

2. But others rejected the message and made trouble. There was violence against Christians – accusations, danger, opposition, persecution. Following Jesus will always provoke opposition and hostility from some. Perhaps you have already found that yourself.

Words about Jesus are very powerful.

• *Who told you about Jesus and all He has done for you? Thank God that this message has come to you. Ask God*

to help you to be a sharer of it too, whatever the cost.

• *Who could you speak to? Pray for an opportunity to speak to that person about Jesus.*

Even if you have only been a Christian a very short time, you can say something to others about Jesus. You can tell others what you know of Him. If people ask you questions you can't answer, it's fine to say, 'I don't know, but I will find out.' But do say something, because words about Jesus are very powerful. They can transform people's lives.

PRAY

• *Thank God that someone brought the message about Jesus to you and told you that Jesus is Lord and Saviour.*

• *Ask God to give you opportunities and courage to speak to others about Jesus.*



So, there had been a riot in Thessalonica. Paul and Silas had left town in a hurry. What had been going on since they left?

Have a look at these phrases from different parts of the letter:

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. (2:1)

But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. (2:17)

So when we could stand it no longer... We sent Timothy... to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no-one would be unsettled by these trials... when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way... when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid... our efforts might have been useless. (3:1-5)

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love... we were encouraged about you... we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. (3:6-10)

• *What can you piece together about what might have been going on?*

It seems that these new Christians had had a tough time. Trials had come. It may be that some people were saying that Paul's visit had been a failure. Maybe some were saying that the gospel Paul had brought wasn't the 'real McCoy'. After all, it had led to much suffering for these Christians. Was it really the genuine article? And wasn't Paul a bit dodgy too? Did he really care about these Christians? He had left in a hurry and never been back. Was he just a slick salesman feathering his own nest in some way?

Paul had heard that the Christians had been under pressure. He had been worried that they might have given up trusting in Jesus. But Timothy had just brought good news about them. These new believers hadn't given up. In fact, they were going on well as Christians.

Can you sense the huge relief Paul felt? He was thrilled. But now he wanted to keep building their faith more and more. He wanted to reassure them in the face of doubts and criticisms.

Do you sometimes wonder whether the message about Jesus is the real thing? Is it really what life is all about? Ask God to reassure you as you read this letter that it is just that. The Thesalonians suffered for being Christians. That may well be your experience too. But ask God to help you to keep growing in your faith, even when it's tough.

PRAY

- *Talk to God about any doubts which are on your mind.*
- *Ask God to use this letter to reassure you that the message about Jesus is true.*
- *Ask God to help you grow in your faith even through sufferings.*