

# Journey Into Defeating Discouragement

## LESSON 1 . . . Being an Encourager (1 Thessalonians 1:1-4)

## NOTES

**D**iscouragement is one of the Evil One’s most effective weapons for defeating believers. He has been using it for thousands of years and continues to use it effectively today. We need to be alert and recognize when he is using this weapon, not only in our own lives but also in the lives of others. People are discouraged for various reasons—a prodigal child, a problem marriage, a financial reverse, a health difficulty, etc. Discouragement is rampant. That’s why we need to study *1 Thessalonians*. The key phrase or theme of this book is found in 4:18 and 5:11a. Write it below:

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Paul wrote *1 Thessalonians* to believers in Thessalonica (Thess-uh-loh-nigh´-kuh), a city in Northern Greece, about 100 miles north of Athens. In Paul’s day, it had a population of about 200,000. Thessalonica is one of the few New Testament-era cities to survive. Today, it is called Salonika (Suh-lawn´-uh-kuh). Paul, with his associates Silas and Timothy, established a church in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-10). It was a city with a multicultural population and many pagan influences that challenged the faith of the new Christians there. This city was a very discouraging place for Christians to live. Therefore, the first four verses of this epistle reveal **three** actions required to be an encourager.

### **Attend church faithfully (1:1).**

Paul begins by introducing three men the believers at Thessalonica know well: himself, *Silvanus*, and *Timothy* (1:1a). Paul uses *Silvanus*, the Roman form of the name “Silas,” while Luke prefers the Greek form “Silas” (Acts 15:22). This letter is addressed to the *church of the Thessalonians* (1:1b). The word translated *church* (EKKLĒSIA, ek-clay-see´-ah) means “the assembly” or “the called out.” It was used by the Greeks to describe a group of citizens gathered to discuss governmental affairs (Acts 19:39). However, in reference to believers, it denotes those who are spiritually *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (1:1c). Because we are the church, what does Paul write in 2 Corinthians 6:17a-b, which he cites from Isaiah 52:11?

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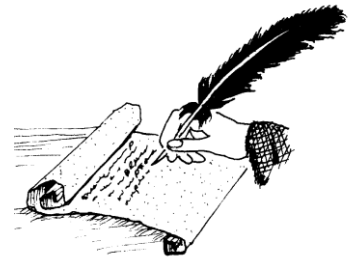
This means we are to be different from the world because we have different morals, values, and purposes. Therefore, trying to live the Christian life can be very discouraging. That's why God calls us out and wants us to assemble. The church is the original support group.

Paul greets his readers with a prayer for *grace* and *peace* (1:1c). *Grace* is what God gives us to handle life's adversities and *peace* is the result. God often gives both when we offer a compassionate ear or encouraging word to someone at church services.

You will find many opportunities to be an encourager if you **attend church faithfully**. An encourager must also . . .

### **Correspond and pray regularly (1:2).**

Paul writes: *We give thanks to God always for all of you* (1:2a). Hand-written notes or letters, like *1 Thessalonians*, are the most effective way to do this because they show a careful, thoughtful investment of time. Also, most people can write what they are not comfortable saying in person. Many of us have difficulty being affectionate or appreciative in person.



Written words of appreciation and encouragement last longer than spoken words. For example, the letter of *1 Thessalonians* has been encouraging believers for almost 2,000 years. We should follow Paul's example and habitually correspond with family and friends to let them know we love and cherish them as special gifts from God. Proverbs 16:24 is even more true in correspondence. Personalize and write it below:

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In our correspondence, we should let people know we are praying for them. Paul writes: *constantly mentioning you in our prayers* (1:2b). Paul is a great teacher and preacher, and he knows believers also need his prayers. Everyone needs prayer. That's why Paul makes what request in *1 Thessalonians* 5:25?

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To be an encourager, **attend church faithfully, correspond and pray regularly**, and also . . .

### **Compliment specifically (1:3-4).**

To really encourage people, we need to be very specific about the things we appreciate about them. This requires more than just saying, "I appreciate you" or "I'm thankful for you." Someone has said, "The mark of an

intelligent person is specifics.” The apostle Paul is a wonderful example of someone who gives genuine, intelligent, specific compliments. He compliments the Thessalonians for three specific things, beginning with their *work of faith* (1:3b). Genuine *faith* reveals itself in works. We are saved by grace alone through faith and not as a result of our works (Eph. 2:8-9). However, our faith should result in good works. In our Christian lives, faith and works can’t be separated. Works do not save us but are the results of salvation. How does Ephesians 2:10a-b express this truth?

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God doesn’t save us just to sit around reading the Bible and praying, as important as those things are. He saves us to do *good works*, which will bring glory to Him (Mt 5:16).

Second, Paul compliments the Thessalonians for their *labor of love* (1:3c). This means the works were also the result of *love*. The word translated *love* (AGAPĒ, uh-gah’-pay) refers to sacrificial love that serves others with no thought of personal gain. This *love* does not originate with us. Then, how can we love with AGAPE love? We find out in Romans 5:5b. Personalize this verse, and write it below:

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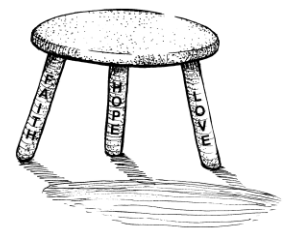
God wants His love to flow through us.

Third, Paul compliments the Thessalonians for their *steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ* (1:3d). The word translated *steadfastness*, or “patience,” refers to endurance of trials, or fortitude. Their endurance was the result of *hope*. Hope always looks forward, beyond the present. It lives with the end in mind. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking; it is confident expectation. How does Titus 2:13 express the hope of a believer?

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The *faith*, *love*, and *hope* for which Paul compliments the Thessalonians are like a three-legged stool. If one is missing, our Christian lives will topple over.



These three virtues are vital components of the Christian life. However, the greatest of these is *love* (1 Cor. 13:13). Why? When we get to heaven, we won’t need *hope* because the second coming will be past tense. We won’t need *faith* because it is the substance, or conviction, of things not

seen (Heb. 11:1). How does 1 Corinthians 13:12a-b explain what it will be like in heaven?

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Silvering, the chemical process of coating glass with a reflective substance to get clear, sharp reflections like we have today, didn't begin until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In Paul's day, mirrors were made of polished brass or copper and offered a vague or dim image at best. We see spiritual things *dimly*, through the eyes of faith. But in heaven, we will see with perfect clarity, like seeing a person *face to face*.

Finally, Paul encourages the Thessalonian believers by writing that God *has chosen you* (1:4). The word translated *chosen*, or "election" (EKLOGĒ, ek-log-ay'), refers to God's selection. Salvation begins and ends with God. It begins when He works in our lives and hearts to draw us to Himself. We don't decide on our own to become Christians. How does the Lord Jesus express this truth in John 15:16a-c?

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The Bible teaches both divine election and human responsibility. How both can be true is incomprehensible to our human minds because God's ways and thoughts are far beyond our understanding (Isa. 55:8-9). This is what is called an "antinomy" (an-tin'-uh-mee), which refers to a contradictory conclusion produced by two correct and reasonable statements or facts.

How do we know if we are one of God's *chosen*, or elect? When we respond in faith to the Gospel! This is also called "divine initiative in salvation." That's why Jesus makes what statement in John 6:44a?

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When someone chooses to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he or she does so only because the Holy Spirit has convicted, urged, and drawn him or her to Him.

To be an encourager, **attend church faithfully, correspond and pray regularly**, but also **compliment specifically**.