

MINING THE BIBLE



I Thessalonians

“The Bible is not a child’s storybook; rather it is great literature that requires thoughtful response. All its diamonds do not lie exposed on the surface. Its richness is mined only through hard intellectual and spiritual spadework.”

Haddon Robinson, Expository Preaching

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ABOUT 'MINING THE BIBLE'

Aim

The aim of these studies is twofold. Firstly, they're designed to help you get to grips with the main message and applications of 1 Thessalonians as a book. There's a second aim though, which is to help equip you to learn to study the Bible for yourself.

How it works

Each study has two sections: Questions and Summary. The questions for each study are intended to get you thinking about the most important things that Paul wants us to understand from each passage. After each of the studies there's a short summary which explains the main point of the passage - but try not to skip straight to this if you're finding one of the questions difficult. Studying the Bible takes thought and isn't always easy, but it's important that you have patience and work hard at understanding it for yourself. If you get really stuck and confused and feel you need the help of the explanation, then do make sure you refer back to the passage again as you read it so that you can see where the points comes from in the text.

As you go through the studies, you'll occasionally come across these symbols:



#PRINCIPLE

This symbol accompanies a key principle to learn for studying the Bible.



#METHOD

This symbol accompanies a method which you might find helpful for studying the Bible.

You'll also occasionally come across blank pages with this faded symbol in the middle:



This is to keep the summaries at the end of each study separate from the questions, to help you avoid the temptation of looking across the page for the answers without first working hard at the passage yourself! You could use this space to make notes.

Note on translations

These studies were prepared from the ESV, and it's recommended that you use either that or a translation with a similar level of accuracy to the original wording of the Biblical languages. Without going into all the reasons for this, an important one is that such translations often help make connections between ideas in different passages easier to pick up on because a common word is translated consistently.

Introduction to I Thessalonians

Welcome to the second booklet in the Mining the Bible series! This guide picks up where the first one on Colossians left off, helping you to continue to put into practice some of the previous principles and method points, while developing your skill set by introducing a few more. If this is the first booklet you've see, it is recommended that you start with the Colossians booklet, which can be found on the Mining the Bible website, before attempting this one.

Enjoy!

More study guides can be found at www.miningthebible.co.uk.

OVERVIEW STUDY

Questions:

Read through the whole of 1 Thessalonians at least twice. Have the questions below in mind as you read through, then try to answer them.

1) What can we tell about the Thessalonians as a church?

- Are they doing well or badly?
- Are there any threats? If so what?
 - Are they internal (from within the church) or external (from non-Christians in the world)?
 - How serious are they?



#PRINCIPLE – Background context from Acts

Sometimes looking at what we learn in the book of Acts about the particular church we're considering (or about the city they're part of) can help us get a better picture of their situation and history, which can aid us in our efforts to figure out why the letter was written.

2) What can we tell about the Thessalonian situation from Acts 17:1-15?

3) Why do you think Paul has written the letter?

Have a go at trying to summarise the purpose of the letter in one sentence:

Summary:

As NT letters go, 1 Thessalonians is a pretty positive one. It's clear from the tone all the way through that Paul is generally very encouraged by the Thessalonians. That they're in pretty good shape is very good news when we consider the circumstances that Paul left them in (Acts 17) - being driven out of town by the Jews who stirred up the city against the gospel.

The Thessalonians aren't without their issues though. It seems that they still face persecution from the outside world, problems with the behaviour of a few people within the church, and generally a bit of confusion about Jesus' return.

STUDY 1: 1:1-10

Questions:

1) Why do you think Paul tells the Thessalonians so much about themselves? Don't they already know this?

2) Why is Paul encouraged by the Thessalonians...

a) From v2-3?



#PRINCIPLE – Distinctive features

These are hard to spot initially, especially if you've not been studying the Bible for yourself for long, but as you get more familiar with the different NT Epistles you'll notice that often an author will say a very similar thing in two or more different letters, but in slightly different ways. It's always worth thinking about why the author has done that - i.e. why is this particular way of putting it more helpful for this particular church?

Why not just say 'faith, love and hope' (e.g. recall Col 1:4-5a)?

#METHOD – Unanswered Questions



Don't worry if you can't answer the question above yet - we've only just started the letter! It's a good practice, though, to note down questions/issues that arise like this as we go through and then try to work them out as we gradually understand more of what the letter is about.

b) From v4-5a?

Recall #Principle - Using Context. We could speculate at what Paul means by 'in power and the Holy Spirit and with full conviction'. However, it's always much safer to see if Paul elaborates on a phrase like this in the immediate context:

3) What does 'Power, Spirit, full conviction' actually mean?

a) How do v5b-7 help us?

b) What do v8-10 add?

4) How does this passage help us to understand more of what 'work of faith' and 'labour of love' means?

5) How would you sum up what the overall picture of the Thessalonians is?

6) Try to summarise this passage in a short sentence.

Application:

1) What things might we be tempted to consider as markers of authentic Christianity?

2) What does this passage show about what true markers of authentic Christianity are?

3) If we want to grow in the things Paul commends the Thessalonians for, how do we? (Think: how did the Thessalonians get like this? See v5-6)

Summary:

According to the Bank of England, there are usually 7 or 8 different ways you can tell whether or not one of their banknotes is authentic. There are some obvious tell-tale signs to look for: the metallic thread or Queen's watermark that both show when held up in the light, for example.

When it comes to authentic Christian faith, Paul also reckons there are some tell-tales signs. He begins his letter by reassuring the Thessalonians that he's absolutely confident they're the real deal - that they're loved by God, and that He's chosen them (v4).

In v5-10 we see the marks of authenticity that have given Paul this confidence. The evidence that God worked powerfully by His Spirit, through His word in them is seen in two areas:

Firstly, their exemplary attitude in v6-7: they were prepared to suffer. Despite the persecution they faced (remember Acts 17) for accepting the gospel, they imitated the apostles by deciding to choose the life of faith, with all the affliction it brought, and did so with God-given joy.

Secondly, their exemplary actions in v8-10: their faith was public and active. They went and spoke the gospel in other places, and were an encouragement to other Christians who could clearly see their desire to serve God and put their hope in Jesus' return rather than things of this world.

Of course, if Paul says the Thessalonians are examples in these areas, then we'll want to aim to be like them. It's worth remembering, then, how the Thessalonians grew to become like this - it was through God working in power through His word, by His Spirit, so that they were fully convicted of the truth of the gospel (v5a).