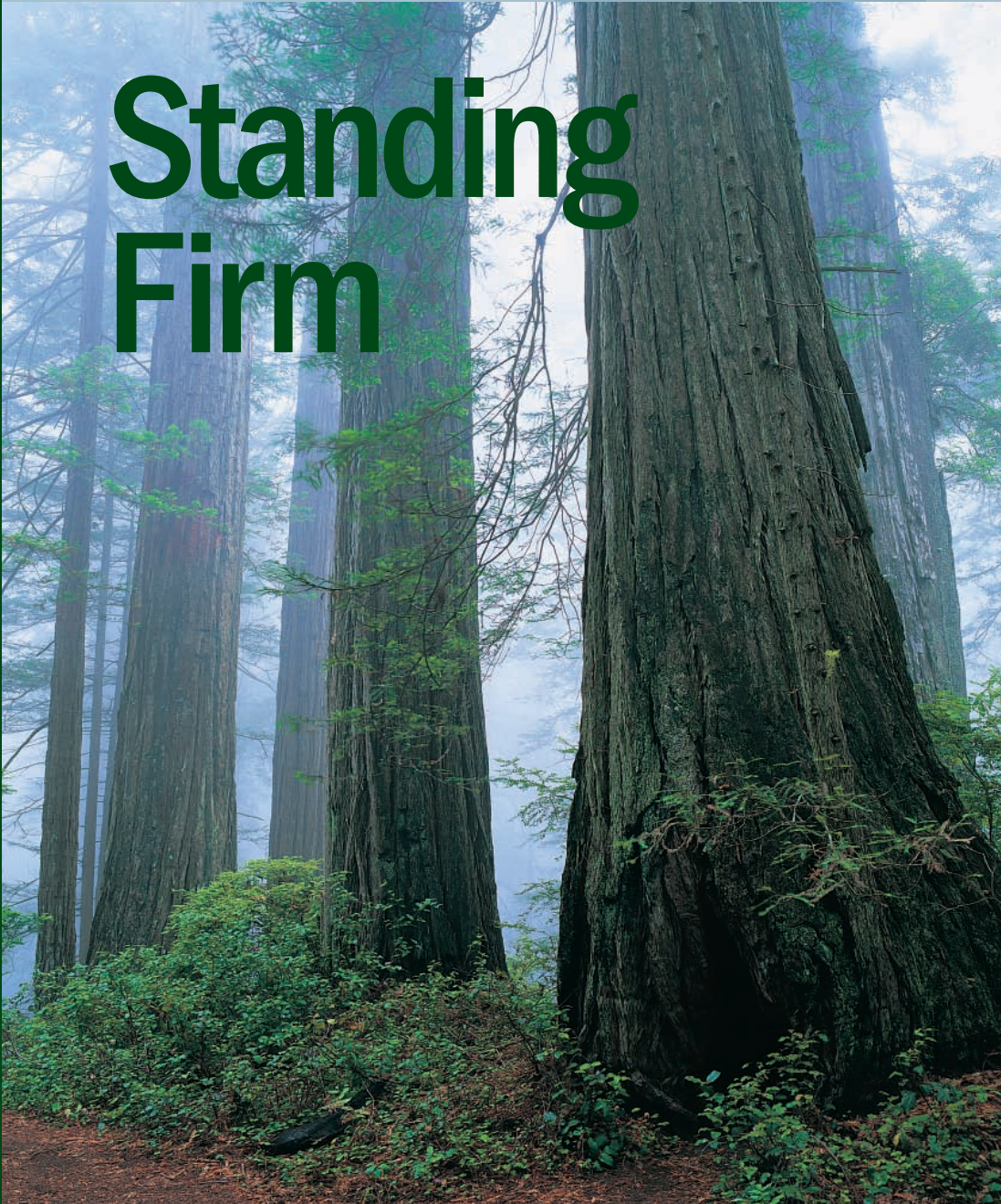




PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

1 THESSALONIANS

Standing Firm





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BY SIMON ROBERTS



matthiasmedia

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Pathway Bible Guides: 1 Thessalonians

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Wherever the apostle Paul went, he seemed to get into trouble. He was beaten and thrown into jail in Philippi, mocked in Athens, brought before the authorities in Corinth, and forced to leave Thessalonica only a few weeks after his arrival. Of course, none of this was the result of bad behaviour. It was because he continued to preach the message about Jesus Christ.

The gospel is that kind of message. It provokes strong reactions. Some will reject it and work to silence those who speak it. Others will accept it and change because of it.

Some of the Thessalonians had done just this. They had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven” (1:9-10). They had made a great start to the Christian life! But having been driven from the city, Paul was unable to care for these new converts as he would have wanted. So he sent Timothy to visit them and, upon Timothy’s return, Paul, Timothy and Silvanus wrote the letter we know as 1 Thessalonians. They wanted to encourage the Thessalonian Christians, and to urge them to *stand firm* in the faith (3:8), even in the face of the opposition they continued to encounter.

Standing Firm is a vital aspect of the Christian life. It means sticking with Jesus, come what may. It means continually returning to the message of the cross and the hope of salvation we have through our Lord

Jesus Christ. But as you read 1 Thessalonians, you'll see that it doesn't mean standing still, because Paul's great desire is that "as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more" (4:1). He wants them, and us, to be continually increasing and abounding in love, faith, hope, joy and thanksgiving. And to make sure it's clear what this means in practice, Paul keeps reminding the Thessalonians of the example he set among them.

You may have been a Christian for a long time; or, like the Thessalonians, for only a few weeks. In either case, my prayer is that, having turned to Christ, you will stand firm in him.

Simon Roberts
January 2006

1. GENUINE IMITATIONS

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10



Getting started

Who do you admire so much that you would go so far as to imitate them?
What makes that person worth imitating?



Light from the Word

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

1. How does Paul know that the Thessalonian Christians are loved by God and have been chosen by him (vv. 4-5)?
2. What do you think Paul means when he says the gospel message came to them “not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (v. 5)?
3. What does verse 10 tell us about Jesus and the content of this gospel message?
4. What is the proper way to respond to this news (vv. 9-10)?

8. Why is the gospel of Jesus a message worth receiving and telling?



To finish

This passage makes it clear that God's gospel can change lives. What things ought you to change, so you can better imitate the example set by the Thessalonians?



Give thanks and pray

- If you are waiting for the return of Jesus and deliverance from the wrath to come, thank God that he has chosen you.
- Ask God to help you better imitate the example of the Thessalonians.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. GENUINE IMITATIONS

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

► Remember: 60/40/20

Because the *Standing Firm* studies are designed to be brief, we have not included much background information at the beginning of the first study. If you have time to add an extra week before beginning the studies themselves, it would be a helpful exercise to read through the general background to the spread of the gospel throughout Macedonia—as found in Acts 16-17—and to track Paul's journey through this region on a map. You might also consider reading over 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 to find out more about the specific background to this letter. If you then distribute these *Standing Firm* studies to people at the end of your introductory study, it will give people a week to prepare for the first *Standing Firm* study.



Getting started

One of the key ideas in this study is imitation. The Thessalonians became imitators of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, and therefore of the Lord. In turn, the Thessalonian Christians became an example to all the believers in their region. The opening question is meant to get people thinking about what makes a person someone worth imitating.

Studying the passage

The central theme of this passage is that God changes lives. It's through the gospel that God saves people from the wrath that is to come; it's through the gospel that God changes people to be more like his son; but more than that, God uses people changed by the gospel as examples for others to imitate.

Paul knows, by the way in which the gospel message came to the Thessalonian Christians, that they are loved by God and chosen by him (question 1). The gospel came to them “not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction”.

Many people heard the message Paul preached when he visited Thessalonica (question 2), but not everyone accepted it as the word of God because not everyone was chosen by God. Paul clearly says that accepting the word of God for what it really is, the word of God and not just the word of men (see 2:13), is only something people can do because of the powerful work of the Spirit in their lives. It is important we don't impose our own preconceived ideas of what the word coming “in power” or “in the Holy Spirit” or “with full conviction” might have meant. Rather, we should let the passage speak for itself. Verses 6-7 and 9-10 tell us that the gospel produced profound change in the lives of these people. These changes showed that they really had been deeply affected by the gospel; that their acceptance of the gospel was genuine. It was these significant changes that led Paul to the conclusion that the gospel had come to them not as mere words, but in power, in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

Verse 10 gives us a clear summary of the gospel message (question 3). It tells us that wrath is coming; that Jesus is God's son who died and rose again to deliver us from this wrath; and that Jesus will deliver us fully and finally when he returns from heaven.

Verses 9-10 also give us a clear summary of how we should respond to the gospel (question 4). We should turn to God; turn away from false gods; serve God; and wait for Jesus' return. In other words, faith and repentance are the proper response to the gospel.

The gospel had completely transformed the lives of these Thessalonian Christians (question 5). They no longer lived for themselves but in the service of the living and true God, and in eager expectation of Christ's return (vv. 9-10). That is, the gospel had produced a change in allegiance: they now served the living and true God. The gospel had also produce a change in their expectation about the future: they now waited for God's son from heaven. Moreover, their trust in God had transformed their deeds: their love expressed itself in persistent toil for the benefit of others; and their confidence in the eternal deliverance they had in Christ meant they were steadfast despite the very real human opposition they faced.

All of this had made them imitators of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy (question 6).

In addition, like Paul, they too had spread the gospel message in Macedonia and Achaia and the news of their faith had also “gone forth everywhere”. Like Paul, their gospel words were backed up by gospel actions. Further, they had received the gospel with joy in the midst of persecution. For this also, Paul commends them as being an example.

Question 7 explores how the Thessalonians could have received the gospel with joy despite receiving it in the midst of persecution. Without the perspective of the Bible, sometimes it seems that God is at his most distant when we are in the midst of suffering or persecution. The weight of our difficulties seems to mock our trust and hope in God. Yet, when we reflect upon the cross of Christ, everything changes. Jesus’ finished work and example allows us to see how the future joy of the new creation changes our present experience of afflictions, so that we can rejoice even in the midst of suffering. We are not expected to rejoice *because* of sufferings, but rather because we know that our present troubles are only a temporary experience, which God will use for our good. The joy we have springs from a deep conviction that God is in control of all things and is able to do what he has promised. It springs from the knowledge that we are following in the footsteps of our master who also suffered unjustly before entering into his glory (1 Pet 4:1; Heb 2:18). It’s because of this hope that the gospel is a message worth receiving and telling (question 8; see also question 3). We face one of two possible destinies: wrath or salvation (5:9). Accepting the gospel and turning to God is the only way we find salvation. If we know this, then the only loving response is to do what the Thessalonians did and tell others also.