

Daily Devotions  
*from the United Reformed Church*

1 Thessalonians



Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October – Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October

Introduction

Thessalonica was an important city commanding the road between Rome and Byzantium and had a fine port. Paul preached there for three weeks (acts 17:2) before being driven out. The church here was entirely Gentile and 1 Thessalonians might be Paul's earliest letter - maybe the earliest of all the Christian writings. As new Christians, with a limited initial input from Paul the believers needed some instruction on how to live - especially as they started to reject aspects of their culture. The letters are concerned with the Last Things - 1 Thessalonians reassuring that those who have already died won't be disadvantaged when Christ returns and 2 Thessalonians teaching that this return won't be immediate. Whilst scholars agree that 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul, there is debate over 2 Thessalonians - some even thinking that it was written first as it covers many of the same themes.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sunday 4th October Psalm 17 .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Monday 5th October 1 Thessalonians - Thanksgiving .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Tuesday 6th October 1 Thessalonians - Paul's Example .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Wednesday 7th October 1 Thessalonians - Faith and Patience .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Thursday 8th October - 1 Thessalonians - Paul's Anxiety .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Friday 9th October - 1 Thessalonians - Timothy's Mission in Macedonia 11</b>	
<b>Saturday 10th October 1 Thessalonians - Thanking God.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Sunday 11th October Psalm 18 .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Monday 12th October 1 Thessalonians - Live in Holiness and Charity ...</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Tuesday 13th October 1 Thessalonians - The Lord's Coming .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Wednesday 14th October 1 Thessalonians - Wait for the Lord .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Thursday 15th October 1 Thessalonians - Stay Awake .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Friday 16th October 1 Thessalonians - Closing Remarks .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Saturday 17th October 1 Thessalonians - Closing Prayer and Farewell .</b>	<b>26</b>

### Sunday 4th October Psalm 17

The Rev'd Elizabeth Gray-King, Education & Learning Programme Officer,  
member St Columba's Oxford

LORD, listen to my righteous plea;  
you will not find deceit in me  
as my prayers rise.

Examine me and probe my heart  
to see that I have kept apart  
from ways of sin.

2: Lord as the apple of your eye  
may I be kept in safety  
by your mighty hand.  
Beneath the shadow of your wing  
protect me from all evil things  
surrounding me.

it is directed specifically to the needs of the church.

'The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' troubled church members in Thessaly. At least some were agonizing about their state of readiness to be judged by Christ, with this anxiety colouring their whole lives. Paul took time to reassure the church; and here we find Paul's calming words echoing in his benediction. It is the God of peace to whom they have already dedicated themselves, who will complete their sanctification. Their being made holy is both a gift and a goal. God's promises to them in Christ remain true. It is a reassurance that echoes down the centuries to all who are worried about the future.

When Paul urges the church to pray for him, we get a glimpse of his need for support. He is aware of the great responsibility laid upon him in bringing the Gospel to many people. I wonder how many in the church regularly pray for their leaders in all aspects of our church life? Such support is needed more than ever in these days of affliction by a global pandemic. The 'holy kiss', one to the other, enjoined by Paul, must perforce be a virtual one these days, but no less valued.

To this very day we commend each other to Christ's favour and kindness.

### Prayer

'Count your blessings name them one by one...'  
How much we need blessing, gracious God,  
and how quickly we forget your generosity.  
May your Spirit's reassuring presence today  
gather us together in praise of your goodness.  
In the life of faith in Jesus Christ may our lives  
flourish as you have promised.  
Never forget us, and walk life's way with us,  
for that is blessing indeed. Amen

Seeking to do good, praying and rejoicing, working to reach consensus in our Church meetings on where the Spirit is leading, and abstaining from evil, are all things that are commended to us.

## Prayer

Lord we thank you for calling women and men from all backgrounds into ministry, both as ordained and lay people, to build up your Kingdom in love. Give wisdom, discernment and patience to all who work alongside people at times of need, in good times and difficult times. May they be guided by your Spirit always. Amen

[Saturday 17th October 1 Thessalonians - Closing Prayer and Farewell](#)

The Rev'd John A Young, retired minister National Synod of Scotland, Member Giffnock URC

1 Thessalonians 5: 23 - 28

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. Beloved, pray for us. Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

## Reflection

Paul's warm tone shows how much he loves and appreciates the Thessalonian Christians. He prays that God will help them remain holy until Christ returns again. 'Observe the affection of the teacher' says St John Chrysostom of Paul's benediction to this letter.

The blessing might well remind folk of Paul's leading the church's worship in person: for words such as these seem characteristic of Paul's farewell greetings. However this is not an 'all purpose' blessing. We find

3: For your own people you provide;  
with gifts their children you supply  
from your great store.

At dawn I will be satisfied,  
when I in righteousness abide before your face.

you can hear v1 here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28TXaVjiO8M>

## Reflection

Oh dear readers, why did I choose this Psalm? That any writer could call themselves righteous is beyond me, and how on earth could any of us say that we have kept apart from the ways of sin? Then there's the apple of the Lord's eye bit! We like to imagine that we are the apple of God's eye. But. Wait. There is the 'even the hairs on your head are numbered' bit from Jesus, saying in different words that we are all apples of God's amazing eye. Hm, perhaps the too righteous one here is me? Thinking how could another call themselves righteous, when it is my self-righteousness that is doing this name-calling?

This Psalmist makes a plea to be put right with God, to be examined and known, appealing to be the apple of God's eye and therefore worthy of protection. First reading could show a puffed up-with-self-presumption writer, but deeper reading reveals a fearful human, worried about almost everything, seeing evil all around, desperate for God's care. Here is a faithful human, naming God's provision for others and desperately hoping to receive the same, so perhaps, perhaps tomorrow, fear goes away.

This appeal to receive the same mercy as others goes deep. It is deeper than the cry of 'why me?' It is a cry of 'why can't my life be treated with the same value as theirs?' It is the cry of my brown and black family, the wail of my sisters and brothers and partners and neighbours all saying – 'why won't you protect me, too?' We each may own this cry to God for

ours and for other's lives. And we and you and I and all of us from anywhere need to prepare to be God's very active answer, fruitful in justice.

## Prayer

Dearest God who loves us all whether we like it or not, open our minds and hearts more thoroughly than we have ever allowed. Don't shield us from what we need to know about ourselves and need to see from other people's eyes. Humble us then drag us into courage to act. We trust you. Amen.

[Monday 5th October 1 Thessalonians - Thanksgiving](#)

Val Morrison member of the URC in Doncaster

## 1 Thessalonians 1

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and

See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

## Reflection

As often at the end of a NT epistle, lots of good stuff about Christian living, relevant to every age. While to us it sounds like sound Christian teaching, for the new converts who heard it first, some of these instructions would be radically different to their former way of life. Writing this in Coronavirus lockdown, the whole country is respecting those who labour among us and esteeming them highly because of their work: NHS workers, care staff, all involved in food production and supply, teachers, waste disposal workers and many more, some of them people we take for granted and only now realise fully the immense value of what they do.

But in fact, Paul is inviting respect for people working among the Thessalonians to build up the church, those with oversight and responsibility. So let's be thankful too for church ministers, CRCWs, moderators and all those who work in our denomination (and others), even when what they say is challenging or difficult.

A minister's role has been defined as 'comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable' – or, as Paul says here to an individual leader, give a kick to some, get people who think they can't do things to have a go, help the weak, give encouragement, and be patient with everyone, treating them as individuals loved by God.

Paul also warns us to be careful with what we hear, testing everything: again, relevant in these days of fake news, scams and phishing emails. Don't believe everything you hear but test to see if it is genuine. How do we recognise the authentic word of God in our information-loaded lives?

Paul writes to a church for whom tribulations are a constant theme. They, too, are unpopular in a city where the cultic religions hold supreme influence. They have experienced much grief—sleep is the metaphor he’s been using to describe the many in Thessalonica who have died. But in verse 6, he uses a different word for sleep that connotes moral dullness. Paul celebrates the church for what they do well, but at the same time he warns them of spiritual boredom. Imagine: a boring church! A belief in the Second Coming can cause one to say, “what’s the point?”

This may be the question so many people of faith are asking in this year of quarantines, death and unrest. What’s the point of being the church when we are without our rituals and buildings as we know them? Paul answers our ‘what’ with a reminder of who we are: children of light who are not caught off guard by the dark. Faith lived for real keeps us on our toes, ready to find new ways of discovering the sacred and being sacred in the world.

Stay awake for the great revolution!

Prayer

God, You hold us in arms of compassion even as you keep us on our toes. When the frights of life make us sleepless, may the pursuit of your peace keep us awake. Amen.

[Friday 16th October 1 Thessalonians - Closing Remarks](#)

Ruth Tompsett is an elder at Newport Pagnell URC

1 Thessalonians 5: 12 - 21

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them.

true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Reflection

Read this first chapter of the first letter to the Thessalonians and I suspect that many of us come away with that ‘feel good’ factor. The letter is thought to be one of the oldest – probably the oldest – of the books contained in the New Testament. Written in about 51 CE merely twenty years after Jesus’ death and resurrection and here were a group of people for whom the gospel had come alive. Not only had it come alive for them in Thessalonica but they had spread the message through the province of Macedonia and Achaia.

In this prayer of thanksgiving, Paul talks of them as faithful, hopeful and loving, chosen by God but crucially people who responded with joy, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was this joy and inspiration that enabled the gospel message to be spread beyond their own city.

And so it was that Paul gave thanks, not just for a group of faithful people but in recognition that God is at the centre of their lives and the journey of faith which they are travelling.

Wouldn’t any church be pleased to receive such affirmation and encouragement. 2000 years later it might cause us to look carefully at our own situation and to ask the question ‘is this the church to which I belong?’

As I write this at the end of May we have lived through 10 weeks of lockdown. There is much talk of what the world post Covid-19 might look like and encouragement to churches to think about how the experience will shape their future ministry and mission. Of one thing we can be sure, as the Thessalonians had found, that future must be built on having God at the centre, enabling a faithful, hopeful and loving people to be witnesses in a changing world.

## Prayer

Eternal God, we hear your call to be faithful, hopeful and loving citizens of your kingdom. May our joy in your service inspire us to witness to you, our living and true God. Amen

## Tuesday 6th October 1 Thessalonians - Paul's Example

Dr Sam Richards, serving as Head of Children's and Youth Work, member of mayBe community, Oxford.

### 1 Thessalonians 2:1 - 12

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

## Thursday 15th October 1 Thessalonians - Stay Awake

The Rev'd William Young, pastor, Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ, Washington DC

### 1 Thessalonians 5: 4 - 11

But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

### Reflection

Four days before his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. gave his very last Sunday sermon in the National Cathedral in Washington DC. He recounted Washington Irving's story of Rip van Winkle, who slept through the American Revolutionary War. History was turning and old Rip missed the moment. King was afraid that day that America and the world was missing theirs.

Contrary to our romanticized view of King, at the time of his murder he was the most hated man in the country by all races. The world was at a fevered pitch, and in a few days his death would tip the scales of unrest. The world on 31 March 1968 was not the most jovial, and yet the unpopular King told a city about to burst open, "We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in a single garment of destiny...I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be..." and vice versa.

human history when it appeared that the western European empire in which we lived could indeed offer peace and security. We need not fear war; nature had largely been tamed (at least in our part of the world); and even crime rates were down. Passages such as these therefore puzzle us, as they fail to connect with our lives. The God they describe seems rather vindictive – why would He want to disrupt our peaceful existence in this way?

It may be that 2020 will come to be seen as the year when all that changed. A global pandemic – preceded for us in south Wales by destructive floods – have shown us a nature far from tamed. The floods came like a thief in the night; the arrival of COVID-19 was sudden. Perhaps we can now reconnect with Paul's apocalyptic theology. It turns out that we are after all dependent on nature. The Empire in which we trusted has failed to protect us as promised – indeed, some of its actions have made things worse. There is no escape from our need for God.

#### Prayer

Creative, powerful, world-overturning God,  
we have for too long relied on the peace and security  
offered by political systems and possessions.  
Forgive us for trying to escape from your presence,  
for dismissing the Biblical passages which talk of your judgement,  
for praying for our comfortable life to carry on as 'normal',  
for resisting the coming of your Day.  
Wake us up to the coming of your Kingdom  
and prepare us to meet you. Amen.

#### Reflection

This is the relational gospel. Four decades ago, when I started out in youth work, this was the core text for ministry among unchurched young people. Here Paul demonstrates how fully he has embraced the way of Jesus, how deeply he understands that the medium and the message are one.

He shows us that we can only truly tell people the good news that God loves them by actually loving them ourselves. Our evangelism must be deeply rooted in love for God AND love for those we are called to reach out to. Otherwise we are just a sales force, with all the patter. The gospel is costly to those sharing it, free to those receiving it. The vulnerability of offering love can be very costly. Ask any parent, sibling or friend. Paul uses the imagery of the tender care of a breastfeeding mother, the fatherly nurture of character and life choices, the sibling relationships of living and working alongside each other to describe this love. It is the day-to-day intimacy of lives shared, living out the gospel in the most ordinary ways, that gives the message of new life in Christ real meaning.

God in Christ became human and came to live among us to be the way, the truth and the life. He did not seek praise, wealth, power. He never tricked anyone or took advantage. He spoke of loving like the forgiving father of a prodigal, or a mother hen keeping her chicks safe, and his words rang true because he lived out that love. If communication is famously only 7% verbal, then not surprisingly it is against our lives, and the quality of our relationships, that our words will be tested. Jesus shared his very self. Integrity and intimacy were his mission methods. They were Paul's. They should be ours.

#### Prayer

Jesus you lived a life poured out for others:  
You loved the unlovely and the loveless,

You shared your very self,  
You invited all to share new life through you.  
Help us to step out in costly love:  
To reach out in love,  
To speak the truth in love,  
Sharing our very selves with all our brothers and sisters  
As we share your love and your life. Amen.

[Wednesday 7th October 1 Thessalonians - Faith and Patience](#)

The Rev'd Jenny Mills. URC Secretary for Education and Learning.

1 Thessalonians 2: 13-16

We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last.

Reflection

The book of 1 Thessalonians, likely being Paul's first letter, is a book of its time. As we read it we enter the 'harsh first-century Mediterranean world of violent stereotypification and vilification of out-groups' (The Oxford Bible Commentary, p.1205, OUP). In it we can hear words that sound, to us, unethical and harmful, such as denigrating the Judeans of killing Jesus (even though he was crucified by the Romans!). Many of us hoped and believed that overt prejudice and public condemnation had begun to disappear from our world. Yet we have seen a growing number of hurtful, harmful, judgemental and divisive words being shared on

Prayer

O God, who knows my heart,  
give me grace to grieve, when I must,  
with the fierce courage that love demands,  
and the hope that faith inspires,  
in the name of Jesus, the Risen One, Amen.

[Wednesday 14th October 1 Thessalonians - Wait for the Lord](#)

The Rev'd Gethin Rhys is Policy Officer for Cytun (Churches together in Wales) and a member of Parkminster URC, Cardiff.

1 Thessalonians 5: 1 - 3

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

Reflection

"You know very well," says Paul, "that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." This theological statement is rooted in his congregation's everyday reality. Although the Roman Empire was technologically very sophisticated, it had never mastered the forces of nature. Storms, plagues, earthquakes and volcanoes could turn life upside down at any moment, with no warning – just as criminals could. The Roman Empire's claim of offering "peace and security" was – ordinary people knew – pretty hollow. This was a natural metaphor for the disruption of the world that would signal the arrival of the true peace and security of God's Empire.

We post-War baby boomers have lived through a most unusual period in



left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

## Reflection

Few people go through life without experiencing the pain of bereavement or without having to go through a time of grief. It is one of the wonders of human life that we are able to love each other so deeply that we grieve, sometimes so profoundly, for those who die. Of course, the particulars of every experience are different, but grief is an experience we can recognise across the years. And here is a Christian writing to other Christians, who are grieving. It may be that their grief was made worse because of fears that, by dying before Jesus had returned, their loved ones would not rise with Christ. But, whatever the specific situation, this piece of this letter offers something to anyone of us who might read it. Paul does not tell these Christians in Thessaloniki not to grieve, that death is nothing at all, or that those for whom they grieve have gone into the next room or 'passed away'. He tells them to grieve, but not to grieve 'as others do who have no hope'.

There is no escape from the pain, or the work, of grief. As someone once said, 'the only way through it is through it'. However, we grieve, as Christian people, in a context of hope. Just as Jesus died and rose again, just as death could not defeat him, so death does not have the final victory over our lives, or the lives of those who have already died.

Few of us might feel we can say more than this, about times and seasons. But the Christian faith is founded on the conviction that even the deepest pain and wounds of human life, those profound experiences of grief and loss, can be framed with hope.

social media and in public forums in recent years. Some of these words have even come from those in positions of power and responsibility. When we read this text, we can see why some have used words from the Bible to hurt and harm; using the phrase 'God's Word' has been used as a reason to condemn, criticise or shame others. Yet we believe in a God of love, so if our words destroy and hurt then we surely need to ask if they are of God or of us! When I share a Bible reading in public, I end with the words: 'in this is the Word of the Lord' as there are some texts, such as this, that are problematic. I believe God wants us to consider carefully and critically what we hear or read in Scripture and sometimes we need to look closely before we can find God's authentic word to us. God is love and, as followers of Jesus, we are called to ensure we reflect that love by our words, actions and attitudes (in public and private) and cannot use the excuse of 'God's word' to harm or damage others.

Loving God,

We inhabit a world that is the result of all that has gone before:  
a world of good and bad, kind and hurtful.

As we seek to live authentic God-focused lives,  
we pray that we may choose our words carefully,  
using those that build up and encourage.

We pray for strength as we share your love,  
in many and varied ways, with the hurting world in which we live.  
Amen.

[Thursday 8th October - 1 Thessalonians - Paul's Anxiety](#)

The Rev'd Andrew Royal Minister: Maidstone & Staplehurst URC's

1 Thessalonians 2: 17 - 20

As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you—in person, not in heart—we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before

our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!

## Reflection

Does this remind you of any situation that you have faced recently? Being separated, changed plans, diaries cleared, events cancelled and postponed, family that you want to support but only allowed to do it from a distance?

Paul wants to visit his family. He has described himself as both mother 'Like a nursing mother taking care of her own children' (2:7) and Father 'For you know how, like a father with his children' (2:11)

Paul has become an orphan (that's one way to describe lockdown) to those he cares deeply about and he wants to be back with them, sharing the gospel of the person of Jesus.

Who knew, when we have uttered these or similar words: 'Absent in body but present in mind' that was a common phrase in Graeco-Roman letter writing?

I am uncomfortable with any thought that Covid-19 is seen as the devil's work but many will want to have that conversation with you. Paul says that's what has messed up his plans. For Paul the devil always puts obstacles in the way of the progress of the Kingdom of God and tries to hamper the good works of God's servants.

May we experience some of Paul's joy as we gradually return from being on-line, disconnected, re-connected to our New/Old frontlines. Walking the way of Jesus today we can be freed from the guilt of those things that have may have dragged us down in lockdown. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Paul pins everything on this community: 'They are his hope, joy and

with only limited knowledge of the claims of Christianity, where morals (and not just sexual ones) seem different to what's gone before and where we debate the rights and wrongs of that. We too need to support others - other believers as well as those who are vulnerable and oppressed by our economic and social systems. Around the world believers still need to keep their heads down - not so much as a form of holiness but of survival.

Like the earliest believers we are called to be holy; what that means for us is informed by Paul's words but has to be worked out, even in fear and trembling, in our own contexts.

## Prayer

O God, from whom all holy desires,  
all good counsels, and all just works do proceed;  
give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give;  
that both, our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments,  
and also that, by thee,  
we being defended from the fear of our enemies  
may pass our time in rest and quietness;  
through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

[Tuesday 13th October 1 Thessalonians - The Lord's Coming](#)

The Rev'd Dr Susan Durber is Minister of Taunton United Reformed Church

1 Thessalonians 4: 13 - 18

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are

one wrongs or exploits a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you. Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly towards outsiders and be dependent on no one.

### Reflection

At ordination and induction ministers and church related community workers make solemn vows including the, rather catch all, promise to live a holy life. Despite creative attempts to be unholy the church has never fully defined what holiness, in that context, actually is.

In today's passage Paul puts some meat on the bones for believers in the earliest Church. These new believers had to work out how to be faithful to Christ where Christianity was alien to the ideologies and practices of the age. Paul, the observant Jew, was horrified by the sexual mores of Roman society and here, clearly, is concerned that these new converts don't wallow in Gentile sin. He doesn't limit his view of holiness to sexual morality, however. Loving one another, supporting other communities of believers and keeping one's head down were all forms of commended behaviour. The earliest believers had to find a balance between living a radical commitment to Christ, being different from the people around them in terms of belief and behaviour and, at the same time, having to live quietly and attend to their own affairs to avoid persecution.

We also live in a time which is not that unlike Paul's. We live in a society

crown of his claim to honour; in the presence of his Lord Jesus at his Parousia they will be his honour and joy'\*

What an incentive to keep working in order to attain the glory that is to come!

\*The Oxford Bible Commentary Page: 1205.

### Prayer

Loving God, as we pray and praise you without ceasing fill us with your grace and love.

When faced with distance may we be present through your Spirit, so that we seek more opportunities, not obstacles to following you.

We pray that our lives with you will be  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before you,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise. Amen.

*© R&S 663 Love Divine Charles Wesley*

[Friday 9th October - 1 Thessalonians - Timothy's Mission in Macedonia](#)  
The Rev'd John Durell, retired minister, member of Waddington Street URC, Durham

### 1 Thessalonians 3: 1 - 5

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; ~~so~~ it turned out, as you know. For

this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labour had been in vain.

## Reflection

Paul experiences not just the pain of self-isolation, but the anxieties and frustrations of being cut off from a faith community. “I ought to be there” is a natural reaction when we hear of the needs of a family member or a friend – or (as with Paul) when there is no news of them. The hurt and regret that so many people have felt when lockdown regulations insisted “You stay where you are” will take a long time to heal. And for Paul there is a similar hurt in not being able to travel to where he is surely needed.

But think of Timothy, knowing that he is only the stand-in. Paul wanted to be travelling to Thessalonica himself, and the Thessalonians would certainly have preferred to welcome the “real” apostle. But between them they recognise that good may come out of this less than ideal compromise, and there is genuine hope for a strengthening of faith and mutual encouragement.

Paul is writing against a background of threat and persecution. Maybe the threat of the pandemic is still a factor in our life decisions – or maybe travel restrictions, lack of finance, or the loss of energy that comes through ageing are holding us back from what we hoped to do, and from where we hoped to be. Although Paul has seen the hand of Satan holding him back and blocking his way, finding another way forward now gives Timothy the opportunity to develop his own gifts and ministry.

Paul has to move on from thinking of himself as indispensable for the life of the community he loves and cares for. If I can't manage myself to do what I once thought God was asking of me, maybe it's time to look around and find someone else to take my place.

OK, it must be OK, somehow. We use the same metaphors as the Psalmist, as we find ourselves ‘all at sea’, or ‘rocked to the core’, or feeling that everyone is against us or that no-one understands. It's rare to find such disturbing experiences captured so vividly.

The temptation is to quieten such feelings. But, first, they deserve to be heard. Perhaps our prayer today can simply be to speak before God with such honesty ourselves; either from present storms or from memory of them. Today, just as in the Bible, there is space for such prayers.

## Prayer

O God, when my life reels and rocks,  
when the floods engulf my soul,  
and I am sinking, desperate and afraid,  
hear my cry, and rescue me.  
When I can hold on no more,  
take my hand, and pull me close, that I may live.  
My lamp is sometimes low and the light fades,  
but keep it glowing with your light,  
and keep my flame alive, Amen.

[Monday 12th October 1 Thessalonians - Live in Holiness and Charity](#)  
The Rev'd Andy Braunston minsters with four churches in and around Glasgow.

## 1 Thessalonians 4: 1 - 12

Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you knows how to control your own body in holiness and honour, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no

7: God has rescued me from strife  
with the nations all around.  
He has made me head of all;  
foreign leaders now bow down.  
Yes, the Lord exalted me  
over all my enemies;  
they obey all my commands,  
cringing low on trembling knees.

8: God, the Lord, my Savior, lives!  
To the Rock be all the praise!  
He has overcome my foes,  
shown me His unfailing grace.  
Lord, I will extol Your name  
and make all Your blessings known.  
You give vict'ry to Your King,  
give His heirs a royal throne.

Ada Roeper-Boulogne © 1987 Faith Alive Christian Resources

you can hear v1 sung here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbc0gBkGDsE>

### Reflection

This is one of the longer of the Psalms and it won't likely be among your favourites if you prefer walking beside still waters or lifting your eyes to the quiet hills.

This is more like a white-water ride; engulfing floods and trembling mountains, the snares of death and fearful enemies, reeling and rocking aplenty. The writer longs for a rock and a fortress, for security and a refuge, but many of the words of this psalm evoke very powerfully the kind of experiences that are anything but that. And not only does the writer long to be rescued from this frenetic tempest of human experience, but also wants a secure way of knowing that they deserve to be rescued – the kind of security that longs to be able say, 'I'm a good person, so I know I will be OK'.

We all know the power of such experiences and such desires, and of how they can't simply or readily be quelled. There are times in most of our lives when we are completely knocked sideways and we find ourselves pleading for solid ground and for the kind of reassurance that it will be

### Prayer

Loving God  
may we find ourselves  
where you want us to be  
and through the community of your people  
may we know encouragement in our daily living  
and strength to remain faithful to the end.

[Saturday 10th October I Thessalonians - Thanking God](#)

The Rev'd Julian Macro, retired minister, member of Verwood URC

### 1 Thessalonians 3: 6 - 13

But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us—just as we long to see you. For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

### Reflection

Six United Reformed Church Synods are due to meet on this day, but will they? This is written during the lockdown brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic which would prohibit such gatherings and leads me to wonder about the function and value of such events. There is Church

business to which attention has to be given but which rarely proves contentious, there is information sharing which may be done more effectively than by mail or email, but, above all, there is the opportunity to meet and share what is happening in the life of our congregations and to catch up with friends from other churches.

Paul had not been able to return to the Thessalonians himself so had sent Timothy on his behalf as “co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ.” Paul was greatly encouraged by Timothy’s report. What news and encouraging reports do we share at Synods and on less formal occasions? It is good to learn of the ways that local churches are reaching out in service to their communities; it is good to recognise long service by dedicated servants and to welcome new arrivals, but how often do we celebrate growth in our fellowships and deepening of our faith in Christ?

For the young churches to which Paul wrote the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel set them apart from their fellow citizens in clear and sometimes dangerous ways. To what extent is this still the case for us? It is correct to recognise the right of others to follow different religions or none, but that should not mean that we accept the validity of other faiths on equal terms with Christianity.

Paul was encouraged by reports of the faith and commitment of the Thessalonian Christians: may we be able to share such reports in our Synods and all church groups.

## Prayer

Most gracious God, we give thanks for those who have supported and encouraged us on the Christian Way, and we give thanks for the opportunities we have to support and encourage others. Guide us and strengthen us, we pray, to share with others in action and word the Good News of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour: Amen

## Sunday 11th October Psalm 18

The Rev’d Dr Susan Durber is Minister of Taunton United Reformed Church

How I love You, Lord, my God,  
You my Rock and fortress strong;  
constant Refuge, mighty Shield -  
I will praise You in my song.  
Snares of death entangled me,  
hellish torrents frightened me;  
but You heard my desperate cry,  
and Your hand has set me free.

2: All creation reeled and rocked,  
mountains quaked  
when God came down,  
soaring on the wings of wind,  
fire and hailstones all around.  
Then His anger, with a blast,  
split the sea that billowed there;  
when the Lord unleashed His wrath,  
earth's foundations were laid bare.

3: From on high  
the Lord reached down,  
seized me with His pow'rful arm;  
when the floods engulfed my soul,  
He delivered me from harm.  
God, the Lord, my strong support,  
brought me to a spacious place,  
for it is His great delight  
to reward my righteous ways.

4: With the faithful You are true,  
to the pure You show Your grace,  
but to crooked humankind  
You reveal an angry face.  
You, Lord, bring the haughty low,  
save the humble from their plight,  
and You keep my lamp aglow,  
turn my darkness into light.

5: All God’s promises are sure.  
Who is God besides the Lord?  
He is perfect in His ways.  
Who the Rock except our God?  
It is God who gives me strength;  
He enables me to stand  
high above the battlefield,  
held up by His pow’rful hand.

6: God prepares me well for war,  
makes my feet as swift as deer,  
arms me with salvation’s shield,  
makes my pathway broad and sure.  
I pursued my enemies  
till they fell beneath my feet,  
beat them fine like blowing dust,  
low like dirt that lines the street.