



AMPLIFIED DEVO 2016

All scriptures from New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise stated

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever seen a crazy YouTube clip, heard an amazing song, watched a mind blowing movie or come across a hilarious meme? If you have, you can't help but share it with your friends, right? Why is it that we are so quick to look at and share things that matter little, but have such little excitement to share about God? The Bible talks about people who shared about Jesus the same way we share videos of a panda sneezing and falling off the tree. The new believers in Thessalonica had just learned and understood the reality that Jesus died for them. They were so blown away that having a relationship with God only required accepting that truth. Afterwards, the news about their new faith in Jesus **RANG OUT** (1 Thessalonians 1:8) so that everyone, everywhere heard about it!



Paul wrote a letter to these new believers in Thessalonica to encourage them to continue in their unstoppable faith in Jesus. They realized that Jesus took the punishment for their sins, failures and faults because He loved them so much! What if you became captivated by the forgiveness and eternal acceptance that God gives us through Jesus? You wouldn't be able to contain your passion and love for God. It would spread in our families, our schools, our friends and our youth groups! Do you want to love Jesus in a way that everyone, everywhere would hear about it?

During the week following up to Amplified, we challenge you to give up your electronics so that you can focus on Jesus and fall in love with Him all over again or for the first time. The Thessalonian believers made HISTORY. Throughout their lives, they told people about Jesus and His love for them. Many people were so happy to hear about a God that loved them no matter who they were or what they did. The more they shared this with people, the more people believed this about Jesus—and the more people believe in Jesus, there will be that many more people in heaven with God for eternity---forever! Do you want your life to mean something? It starts by being captivated BY JESUS! As you give up media, you will hearing him speak to you! It will give you a chance to be so **captivated** by Jesus' love that you can spread it and **change** the eternal destiny of many of your friends and classmates!

Jesus gave up his life for us because He loves us. In order to show that we love Jesus, we challenge you to give up your cell phones, iPads, TV, Facebook, Netflix, Youtube, etc. for **five days** so you can focus on Jesus.

Write down what you will give up this week so you can spend more time with Jesus.

I will give up _____

How to use this book

Set aside 10 minutes each day to use this book and spend time with your heavenly father.

We are going to look at why these new believers in Thessalonians became so radical in their love for God!

Each day we encourage you to read one chapter of 1 Thessalonians along with reading that day's devotional. 1 Thessalonians is near the back of the Bible in between the books of Colossians and 2 Thessalonians.

Before you read, I encourage you to:

- Find a quiet place with no distractions (and put away your phone!)
- Use a real Bible and a pen to make notes
- Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you have a deeper understanding of God's love for you.
- Confess and ask for forgiveness for anything you feel appropriate
- Read the devotional content for the day together with the scriptures and make notes to help you remember what God teaches you

Read 1 Thessalonians 1

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

² We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

What does the passage say?

When did you last shout out from excitement? Was it when your team scored the winning goal? Was it when you saw a hilarious clip on YouTube? The Thessalonian believers you just read about were so excited about Jesus that they had to tell everyone about it. Their excitement to tell people is described as *rang out* (verse 8). This phrase means a loud shout or a trumpet blast (the loudest instrument in those days).

Paul was so amazed that Jesus died for him (and everybody else) that would believe in Him that he had to SHOUT OUT this message with as many people as he could. As he shared this message, God himself would help them to feel the full weight and impact of this truth. It was so real that they had joy even when they went through severe suffering (verse 6)! Do you want God's love to be this real in your heart? Take a minute to ask God to do it. Pause right now and ask Him!

For some of you, it's difficult being here in Shanghai; however, what makes it bearable is that our loving (though imperfect) family is with us. Our families care for us and are always there for us, even sometimes when we wish they weren't! When you believe in Jesus, God becomes your Father and will care for you, even more than your own loving mom and dad. That's hard to fathom, right? But God does! He loves you and has cared for you more than you could ever imagine. That is exactly why the Thessalonian believers were able to have joy even when they were severely suffering. God was caring for them and they were so in love with Him that nothing, even the worst of things, could keep them from doing anything but rejoicing that their almighty God in Heaven loved them!

On top of that, they could not wait for Jesus to come back! Jesus died, rose from the dead and went up into heaven. He told them that He would return from heaven one day and so they were waiting eagerly for that time! (1 Thessalonians 1:10). They were people who were so in love with Jesus that everyone knew how excited they were for His return! I remember when I was in China for two months without my wife. I could not wait to see her. It was almost unbearable! Some of you can't wait to see a close friend back home or a brother or sister that has gone off to college. Maybe you are so excited to see your mom or dad coming back from their business trip.

In the same way the believers in Thessalonica were waiting for Jesus to return, we are still waiting for Jesus to return. When he does return, we'll be able to see God with our own eyes! I don't know about you, but that is a jaw dropping, amazing moment that I cannot wait for! Are *you* excited about Jesus' return? Or, are you more excited about other things? I'm sure there are everyday things that get you really excited. Don't get me wrong, that's not a bad thing. But the thought of being with God face to face in heaven should trump everything else.

What does this passage mean?

Paul wrote, 'For our gospel (the message of Jesus and God's love for us) did not come to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, with deep conviction...' (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Would you say that you feel fully loved by Jesus? Write down when you met God and felt His love for you. If you haven't yet, write a prayer asking God to help you believe that He loves you so much and also to feel it.

What does this mean for me?

Paul states in verse 14, 'We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, labor prompted by love...' If you are filled with God's love, a natural response is that you will love others. Think of it this way. If you are filled with jelly beans, you have jelly beans to give to others. It's the same for love. If you feel loved, then you can pass on that love to others. Who is God prompting you to love? Is it a friend, a family

member, even an enemy? Is it your youth group? If you're having trouble thinking of someone, the answer is most likely the first person that popped into your mind. What acts of service is God leading you to do in order to display His love to them?

Pray for this person or your youth group that God has put on your heart. Also pray and ask God to help you to show them extra supernatural amounts of love this week. Our own ability and stamina to love can only last so long. We need God to give us HIS unfailing love first so we can love others. Write that prayer down here.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2

On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. ⁷ Instead, we were like young children among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:4-8

What does the passage say?

Here, Paul and others were being persecuted for their faith. All sorts of things were being said about them and false accusations were being made. Much like today if you or I decide to be bold in the faith are we not going to receive some sort of negative feedback which seeks to denounce our belief that we have been saved by our loving Creator? Paul's exhortation is to seek God's approval and not that of man's. He talks about the fact that he never put on a mask to hide that which he was being accused of which was greed. He clarifies that once again God has eyes to see and God knows. The way in which Paul speaks of God really shows how confident He was of God and the relationship he had with Him. Paul then moves on to showing how they truly cared for others and that they sincerely loved others. He tells how much he delighted in sharing the gospel of God and their lives with them.

What does the passage mean?

From this I have found great encouragement and a desire to live a much more transparent, vulnerable, open and honest life. For me, it's like I need to take off my mask and be exactly who my Father created me to be. I need to first realize who I am and who He has made me, then accept this and continually seek Him in order to know His will for my life. Once I have accepted myself, I can then move towards being the man God has created me to be. I want this for each and every one of you. I desire all of you to accept who you are, take off your mask and seek God - discovering who He desires you to be. We mustn't be afraid to share our lives with others for we were made and saved by our Creator God and we should be delighted to share the gospel of God and our lives with others. However, it is essential that we share our true selves with them. They will know if we are fake or if we are hiding behind a mask. I think once we take off the masks and share with our friends who we really are, we begin to make steps towards sharing the gospel of God with them. It's time

to care for others, to love them and to share our lives with them, but we cannot do this if we have not accepted who we are. We are worthy of our Father's love. While we were still sinners Christ died for us. He calls us sons and daughters. He says that we inherit the Kingdom of God. Take off your mask, be who you are and take the next step in becoming the man or woman God created you to be. Transparency, honesty and vulnerability can all be lived out by applying the following to your life:

What does the passage mean for me?

How to take off your mask:

Confess your sins to Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:9)

Confess your sins to one another and pray for each other. (James 5:16)

Share your burdens with others and pray for one another. (Galatians 6:2)

As a Youth Pastor, I want to quote John, 'I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth' (3 John 1:4) ...With this I hope you know just how much I care for you and truly hope that you become the man/woman you were meant to be.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3

So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. ² We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³ so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. ⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.

⁶ But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. ⁷ Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. ⁸ For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. ⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

You've probably noticed already, Paul really loves these people in Thessalonica. What does he say in verse 6 and 10 that shows this?

Reread verse 5. Paul seems really concerned about the Thessalonians walk with God! Do you have anyone in your life that you *really* care about how they are doing with God?

Write their names here. If not, ask God to show you someone in your life who you can pray for their relationship with God.

I believe God intends for each of us to have three kinds of people in our lives:

- Older mentors who teach us (I call them *friendtors*, like friend+mentor=friendtor)
- Peers who encourage us and we encourage (friends)
- Younger people we teach (*friendtees*, like friend+mentoree).

Which of these three was Paul to the Thessalonians?

Friendtor

Who is an older mentor in your life who can help you live wisely? (If you don't have an older friend who speaks into you life, ask God to show you someone you can ask to take this role.)

Friend

Who is a peer or friend that you can depend on for encouragement? (Again, if you don't have one, ask God who you should pursue a friendship with.)

Friendtee

Who is a younger friend God can use you to teach? This doesn't mean that you have to be a formal mentor or teacher to them. This could just be a younger friend or sibling that you know looks up to you—someone you know God has called you to be a good example to (Again, ask if you don't have one!)

Let's take some time and pray for each of these friends. We can do it in the same way that Paul prayed for his friends in Thessalonica! Pray each of these prayers over each of your friends specifically, using their names.

“Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you...”

Pray that God would allow you to spend time with each of these friends and that you would be able to encourage each other. Write your prayer here.

“... and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you”

Pray for love to grow between you and your mentors/friends. Also pray that your friends would grow in love for others around them as well! Write your prayer here.

“... so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”

Pray that God would help your friends/mentors to grow in holiness. Pray that He would convict them of their sin, give them strength to choose what is right, and that He would protect them from temptation. Write your prayer here.

You should know this: each of us youth pastors pray these sort of things for you! We all love you guys in Jesus so much and are continually asking for Him to make you strong in Him.

And this is my prayer for you today:

Jesus, I pray that you would make each person reading this to increase and abound in Your love for others and for You. I pray that You would establish and strengthen their hearts so they can be holy and blameless before You and ready for You to come again to take us home to heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen

Read 1 Thessalonians 4

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.² For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. ⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

I recently have been trying to eat healthier. This has included adding more fruit to my diet. I started to search for some cheap, convenient places for me to stock up on fruit. I was advised that Taobao sells fruit. "So, I was like, score! Taobao would be the perfect place to quench my desire for some great bananas. I don't even have to leave my apartment or bargain prices." This led me to get on Taobao and buy what looked like some mouth watering bananas. However, when these bananas arrived at my door and I unboxed them, I found that they were completely hard and entirely green. Not only were the bananas I purchased not ripe but they were weeks if not a month away from even being close to ripening. Needless to say I will be looking for a different place to purchase bananas in the future.

What does the passage say?

It is interesting to consider the similarities sanctification share with fruits like bananas. Sanctification refers to the process and the final results of this process of making pure or holy. It is like a ripening fruit that results in eternal life (see Romans 6:19-22; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). As a banana ripens it turns from a hard green terribly tasting fruit to a soft yellow delicious morsel of a fruit. As a Christian is sanctified, a Christian is transformed from a person controlled by sinful, lustful desires to a person who is set apart from sin to a holy God. Much like the ripening of a fruit, sanctification is a process, that was set in motion by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This ripening holiness sanctification process continues throughout your relationship with Jesus.

What does the passage mean?

Sanctification means to be made holy. However, this word “holy” can only adequately be used to describe God. Holiness is a characteristic of God, a very nature of God. The process of sanctification therefore necessitates the separation of sin and the acquirement of this quality of God. It is “to be made like God who is distinct from all else and therefore holy. Though we are not yet completely holy, we stand in relation to God as though we were.” (From the *Thomas Nelson Study Bible NKJV*.)

This sanctification process occurs due to God’s Spirit living inside of you. If a believer lets him, God’s Spirit continually separates a Christian from sinful thoughts, actions, feelings, and desires. God’s Spirit sets the believer apart from sin to himself. God is oozing with the quality of holiness, thus being set apart to God causes one to become holy.

Have you ever stopped to consider why Christians refer to the Spirit of God as the Holy Spirit? Well the first reason is because God is Holy. The second reason is because through sanctification God’s spirit actually makes Christians Holy as well! In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 we learn that God desires every believer to be sanctified and that this sanctification will result in the ability to control one’s actions. It is God’s will for all of your actions to be holy and honorable. While this passage may specifically discuss sexual immorality, God’s will is that all areas of your life are holy and honorable, that all areas of your life are removed from sin and set apart to your holy God!

What does the passage mean for me?

1. What does sanctification mean to you? What does holiness mean to you?

2. Why does God want everyone to be holy?

3. What are some different results of sanctification?

4. Why is it important to realize that sanctification, and being made holy is a process just like ripening fruit is a process?

5. In what ways have you hindered the Holy Spirit from sanctifying you and allowing your holiness to ripen?

6. What areas of your life require more sanctification and self-control? List at least 3 areas below.

It is God's will for everyone to be sanctified because through sanctification we are made holy. Since God is holy, he can only be in deep relationship with others who are holy as well. This is why his Holy Spirit lives inside every believer and begins the continual sanctification process in Christians. This enables all Christians to be in an enriching relationship with our holy God! However, do not take advantage of God and think to yourself that you can continue to wilfully sin because "holiness is a process." It is God's will that all believers gain self control through sanctification.

Prayer

Look back at your answers to questions 5 and 6. Present these to God in prayer.

Listen to God reveal to you how to live a sanctified, holy life. Turn the areas you wrote about in question 5 and 6 over to God and live holy through depending on the strength of the Holy Spirit! God wants to eat the fruits of a deep relationship with you! If your holiness is not ripe, much like the hard green bananas currently on my windowsill, allow the Holy Spirit to have its way in your life and continue the process of sanctification in you unhindered.

I pray, dear Lord Jesus that you remove all obstacles to sanctification of those whose read this devotion. Bless all wilful rebellion to be removed and bless them not to unintentionally create obstacles. I pray that you give the reader grace and deeper sanctification in the areas they listed under question 6. May you be glorified through their life, in Jesus' Name, Amen!

Read 1 Thessalonians 5

And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-18

Growing up in Los Angeles I was a pretty lazy kid...I don't think I received many gold stars in kindergarten. In fact, the only top of the class ranking I got was if you counted misbehaving in class...Throughout my middle school and high school years my GPA fluctuated from 3.5+ to sub 2.0! I was still a bit lazy to say the least. Fast forward 15 years to my freshman year in college, my friend asked me if I want to yell at people and win trophies... I was like sure. After a few weeks of joining the team my debate coach told me to stay after practice and then dropped the hammer on me and told me to wake up...He scolded me to grow up from wasting my time, he challenged my motives for school and the debate team. He warned me to make the most of each moment, carpe diem! Instead, I continued to nonchalantly live my life, going to class half-heartedly and not practicing hard enough for our debate competitions. But my coach didn't give up on me, he patiently coached me and by his encouragement he gave me courage to put my best in everything I do. It's been 10 years since college and I can still remember my coach (6'4 big burly fellow bellowing out his expectations of me). He wasn't always gentle but I knew it came out of a place of love.

I think our heavenly Father used my debate coach to wake me up from my dream of living a lazy life. It's time to stop hitting the snooze button on the life that Jesus has called you to live, and start living a life as a Disciple of Christ. As I have learned to be a giver rather than a taker, a contributor instead of a consumer, my world has turned upside down. The purpose of my life no longer meant to provide myself a more comfortable life, my chief aim became to make God known to the people that have yet to meet Jesus.

I know all of us will hit the snooze button on Jesus from time to time, but let's be there to wake one another up.

What does the passage say?

Today's devotional passage is chapter 5 and we will focus on v.14-18. The first two verses remind us to love those around us, even if it's hard to love. We are all on the same team and we should give "courage" by encouraging others to live a life that's worthy of His calling for us. The first attribute that Paul writes about love is patient, so while we love others we need to be patient with them (including our parents, siblings and teachers). It also talks about how some of us are in positions of influence where we never have to

worry about sitting alone at lunch, or maybe talent in certain subject where we don't have to study 20+ hours of calculus, let's be more observant to care for the people around us. Let us each be the light on our campuses so people would ask "what would cause Jonah the Christian to do such a thing...?!"

In the second half of the passage from verses 16-18 answers the question that people always ask: what is God's will for my life? God wants us to:

- Rejoice always
- Pray continually
- Give thanks in all circumstances

These three phrases are quite simple to read on a piece of paper but in reality it'll require so much more to put into practice.

In the NLT version of the Bible, it's written like this:

¹⁴ Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy.

Encourage those who are timid.

Take tender care of those who are weak.

Be patient with everyone.

¹⁵ See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.

¹⁶ Always be joyful.

¹⁷ Never stop praying.

¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-18 (NLT)

We are called to be light in this darkened world.

Additional study

Read Ephesians 5:1-19

¹⁴ for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

¹⁵ So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise.

¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.

¹⁷ Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.

Ephesians 5:14-17 (NLT)

Application

Is there a command to obey?

Is there a promise to claim?

Is there a sin to avoid?

Is there a lesson to learn?

Is there a new truth to carry with me?
