

Prayer

I thank You, Lord Jesus Christ, for You have healed my body;
I thank You, Holy Spirit of God, for You have healed my spirit;
I thank You, Almighty Father, for You have healed my soul.
In Your great love, my Lord and God; You have made me whole!
HALLELUIAH!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Scriptures

Pray today that God's people may rediscover their zeal for God's Word, and learn to love their heritage. Pray against Satan's work to try and separate the Word from the people.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who look after relatives with Alzheimer's disease*
- *Pray for young people who are deciding what to do with their lives*
- *Give thanks for those who work hard for the good of others*

Meditation

If my people would listen to me, says the Lord,
Then they would know how I answer their prayers.

If my people would turn to me says the Lord,
Then they would find through my touch that I love them.

If my people would read my Word, says the Lord,
Then they would not suffer through lack of knowledge.

If my people would love their neighbours, says the Lord,
Then they would find their own lives would be enriched.

If my people would do what I say, says the Lord,
Then they would discover that I am faithful to my word.

If my people would pursue the truth, says the Lord,
Then they would find themselves with me, in my Kingdom.

Life is a challenge for everyone, says the Lord,
And our souls find their peace when we rise to His call.

Bible Study - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

¹ Paul, Silvanus 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 give thanks to God for all of you, remembering you unceasingly in our prayers, ³ keeping in mind before our God and Father your work of faith, labour of love, and perseverance of hope through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, fellow believers loved by God, that you were chosen; ⁵ since our gospel did not come to you in words alone, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with great conviction; and you know what kind of things we did for you.

Review

Paul went to Thessalonica, the capital city of the Roman region of Macedonia, after he had been to Philippi on his second missionary journey, probably around 50AD. At the time, it was the farthest Paul had travelled, and he went there after some remarkable experiences (Acts 16) with his travelling companions, Silas and Timothy. Not too many years later, and for reasons we can only guess at, Paul felt it necessary to write to the Christian community at Thessalonica to encourage them, and this letter is the result. It is commonly accepted that this was one of the first letters written by Paul.

The letter begins just like many of Paul's later letters, with a word of introduction from himself and his companions, a dedication to God, and the greeting 'grace and peace to you'. Each word of this introduction is powerful, bearing testimony to the real events by which the Church of God was being founded in the decades after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Paul always shared his missionary work with others who became his lifelong friends, and he always acknowledged the authority of God and the saving work of Jesus Christ, without whom there was no Gospel to proclaim. Moreover, his famous greeting 'grace and peace' was not just a powerful combination of Greek and Hebrew greetings, it was an immensely meaningful Gospel declaration in its own right, and remains so to this day. The work of God to redeem humanity is an act of supreme grace and love that is freely given and undeserved; and peace is the gift of God to the human soul that turns to Him through faith in Christ. The opening words of a letter can be brief, but often, they mean so much.

Again, as is typical of many of Paul's letters, Paul began by declaring his appreciation of the faith of those to whom he wrote (1:2). Today, it may seem a little 'over the top' if we were to say of anyone 'I always give thanks to God for all of you, remembering you unceasingly in my prayers ...'. However, it is hard for us to appreciate fully the sheer excitement and energy that was generated by the early spread of the church, for this is surely reflected in these words. The first converts had no churches to join; they had to do what seemed best and keep in touch with each other as best they could. Their unity in Christ across the vast Roman Empire (as they perceived it) was a miracle in itself, and if we think of this, it is not hard to imagine that Paul did indeed pray 'unceasingly' for those who had been saved through his ministry and were now the basis of God's work in the world!

In verse 3, Paul reflects this sense of the miraculous in his prayer about the 'work of faith, labour of love, and perseverance of hope ...' of the Christians at Thessalonica. The very existence of the church was a miracle, and in his spirit, Paul and his companions must have been amazed at the answers to prayer they witnessed there. The church had grown even though they had visited only briefly, and this was surely no human achievement but the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit! It is interesting to see that at this early stage in Paul's ministry, he placed together the three great Christian virtues of faith, hope and love (1:3). They occur together in many scriptures, and must surely have been a key part of Paul's own understanding of evidence of God's work in the world.

Then, in the last few sentences of our passage today, Paul continued to speak of the enormity of what was happening at Thessalonica. He knew most surely that those who had responded to the Gospel were not casual Christians. They were 'chosen' by God Himself who had worked amongst the people at Thessalonica 'in power ... and with great conviction.' Sometimes, Christians today wish that they could experience something closer to the life of those early Christians. It is an understandable desire, but our task is to read what happened, and capture for ourselves the sense of vision and purpose in which the church was born. The early days of the church can never be repeated, but the power of God's Spirit is no less bright and energetic today. There are unique and pioneering tasks

to be done now for the Kingdom of God, and rather than imagine we can recapture past glories, perhaps we can be inspired by Paul's praise of the Thessalonians to accept the real challenge of the greater works of God required for our own generation.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Look up in a Bible or other resource where Thessalonica is situated in Macedonia, and check out the route of Paul in Acts 16 and 17.
2. Discuss in your group the meaning of the great greeting of Paul; 'grace and peace'. What does it mean to Christians today?
3. How is the Holy Spirit at work amongst the Christians you know, and what is He doing to create the church of the future?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Whenever I read the beginning of one of Paul's letters, I am filled with a sense of excitement as I wonder what it must have been like to be a Christian in those early days. Surely, they must have asked themselves, 'why me, Lord?' with a sense of wonder and awe. The changes that the early Christians had to make in their lifestyle were considerable, because the moral and ethical issues involved in being a Christian were so different. Moreover, they had to learn to deal with living in the highly superstitious and religious world of the Roman Empire. It has never been easy to be a man or woman of faith, and all of us have to make choices!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What are the most significant moral and ethical issues that separate a Christian from other people in the world today? If you are someone who reads, then think about a novel you have read recently, and consider the difference between the Gospel and the basic morality found in that novel.*
- *Pray for all who do the work of the Gospel today in pioneering situations. If you know any people in this role, then do your best to pray for them regularly.*

Final Prayer

Bless those we love this day, Lord Jesus; keep them in Your care and protect them from all evil. If there are problems between us, may we be humble enough to let you heal us; and if we need to face challenges together, may we help each other with unfaltering love and persistence. Lord Jesus, we give You the glory, for You have given us each other. AMEN