

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

INSPIRATIONAL NOTES

Thank you, thank you very much. I thank you, and you, and you. 'Thank you letters' are nice to receive. Out of Paul's thirteen letters he begins eight of them with thanking the people whom he's writing to. In his two letters to the Thessalonians he gives thanks for the people five times. Let's hear all those words of thanks so that we can feel the full impact of Paul's gratitude.

"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers (1:2). We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (2:13). For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God (3:9). We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing (2:13). We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2:13).

Do you show such gratitude to others, letting them know that they're appreciated? Do you let others know about the goodness that you see in them? This is more than just being kind to others. This is showing people that they're valued, and why.

Do you let people know that you're praying for them? Do you let new believers know that you thank God that they are believers in God's Word? When people bring joy into your life, do you tell them? Do you rejoice over the faith of others? Do you thank God that He chose the people whom you see in this church, that He has saved them and made them holy by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God?

That's what this letter is all about, and we only look at the first chapter of it today. Your words of thanks don't have to be long. They can be little notes left for the person to find, or a text message of thankfulness and love. Just think about that as we go through this sermon – about how can you encourage and support others with your love and thankfulness.

I thank God for you, that He has chosen you. Just imagine that. I'm not asking you to be thrilled that I thank God for you, for who am I. But rather the inspiration comes in what I'm thanking God for. God has chosen you. To the Ephesians Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **even as He chose us in Him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him" (1:3-4).

This is a very inspirational and uplifting thought. God the creator of the world, before He created the world, He chose you. Yet, because Paul opens most of his letters with thanking God for the people he's writing to many people just pass these words over, cast them aside as unimportant. They say that this is just the way that Paul writes, and it's kind of like a form letter. It's meaningless flowery decoration. But when you see it three times in this letter, you have to realize that these are not meaningless words from Paul. These are not meaningless messages from God to us.

You're not unimportant. God doesn't pass you by or cast you aside. At times in life you may feel like you're being ignored by other people. And yes, as people we do that to one another. We exclude certain people from certain groups. We let them know that they're unwelcome. And when you're rejected that hurts. You hurt people when you sin against them and exclude them for whatever reasons you have. You don't like their tattoos. You don't like their poverty. You don't like their riches. Where are the people of different ethnic origins in our church, you know the ones you complain about because you can't understand them, or because they're taking most of the jobs.

I hear more complaints about others than words of thanks and praise. It's easier to put someone down than to lift them up. We can be very eager to tell others about the bad things we see people do, and we can be reluctant to praise people for the good things that they've done.

Try speaking positive words to your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and you may feel that it's hard to get those words out of your mouth. So maybe you do have to start with a little note to them, which would be an easier thing to do. Try writing to our confirmands of years gone by and telling them that you remember their confirmation day and that you still give thanks to God for when they confirmed their faith. You thank God that He chose them to be a part of our church. You thank God that He chose them to be a part of the family of God and they have a life that's worth living and is meaningful.

Maybe you don't have those thankful feelings right now, but as you try to remember those confirmands, and try to write that letter, maybe those thankful feelings will grow in you. Then you may wonder what you can say to your other fellow Christians, other than that God chose them. Maybe they know that already.

Maybe you can thank God that they faithfully heard God's Word and faithfully responded to God. They faithfully turned away from whatever sinful thing they were struggling with. Paul talks of idols, yet for your Christian friend it may be a drug addiction that they're still struggling with and they need to hear a word of encouragement from you so that they don't give up the battle and turn away from God and go back to their sinful addiction. We don't know

what everyone is struggling with. People can hide it very well. It's not just youth, but elderly people also struggle with gambling and pornography, and they need to know that a friend still cares about them and is watching over them. People need to be encouraged to let God turn them away from their sin.

We need to let God turn us to Himself away from our idols. Let God turn us to serve Him faithfully. God is the One who will deliver us from His wrath that is to come for all sin because He's the One who raised Jesus from the dead. That's how Paul ends this chapter, encouraging us to wait for Jesus from heaven whom God raised from the dead, who will deliver us from the wrath to come.

God turns us to Him with this incredible message of hope, and then He turns us to others so that we may share our hope with them with caring spoken words, or loving notes, cards or texts. God turns us to see those who are not seen, those who are feeling down, not loved or cared about. Let them know that you remember their grief over loved ones who died years ago. Let them know that they're not forgotten, but remembered and cared about.

And then there are those whom you admire and appreciate. Cheer them on for the good things that they do, and let them know that you're thankful for them.

This is a letter that Paul wrote to Christians and we should read it in that way. This is a letter to us, showing us how much God cares for us. Does this spur you on to live in loving relationships with other Christians? A little friendliness goes a long way to lift people up when they're down, or to keep them from falling down.

The Sunday school children wrote notes of thankfulness to the shut-ins in our church, and the people I delivered them to really perked up with cheerfulness when they received them. Maybe you could write notes to the Sunday School children, or the shut-ins, or those whom you don't see around here anymore and tell them that you miss them mentioning the good times you remember, or maybe write those who do most of the work around here and tell them that you appreciate what they do. You can write caring notes to people who are laid off, out of work, lonely, sick or overworked caring for sick family members.

The people whom you could thank and encourage are endless, but remember to make them notes of faith, just as Paul ends this chapter and as he also ends this letter saying, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as many of you are already doing" (5:9-11). Amen.