

“You Became a Model to All Believers” (1 Thessalonians 1)(8.16.20)

1 Thessalonians 1 (NIV84)

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.

²We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. ³We continually 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.

⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸The 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, ⁹for 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, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“You Became a Model to All Believers”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Did you know that your outlook on the future frames your state of mind in the present? Eugene Peterson explains this in his introduction to his paraphrase of 1 Thessalonians: “The way we conceive the future sculpts the present, gives contour and tone to nearly every action and thought through the day. If our sense of future is weak, we live listlessly. Much emotional and mental illness and most suicides occur among men and women who feel that they “have no future.”

The Christian faith has always been characterized by a strong and focused sense of future, with belief in the Second Coming of Jesus as the most distinctive detail. From the day Jesus ascended into heaven, his followers lived in expectancy of his return. He told them he was coming back. They believed he was coming back. They continue to believe it. For Christians, it is the most important thing to know and believe about the future.

The practical effect of this belief is to **charge** each moment of the present with hope. For if the future is dominated by the coming again of Jesus, there is little room left on the screen for projecting our anxieties and fantasies. It takes the clutter out of our lives. We’re far more free to respond spontaneously to the freedom of God.”

When Paul, Silas, and Timothy planted the church in Thessalonica, it was in a day not unlike our own. Idolatry and sexual sin were rampant. There was great resistance to the true God and the Son, Jesus who came and is to come again. The Holy Spirit moved in power. The hope of Jesus’ return sustained this small church of faithful disciples. Have you and I appropriated this hope in our personal lives and in the context of this church in our present day of chaos and confusion?

We proclaim this hope in the Nicene Creed. We proclaim this hope in the Apostle’s Creed. Are they empty words that we recite mindlessly? Or, are they a truth that informs our thoughts and actions? This is a very positive letter from Paul to the Thessalonians. He wants to encourage them. He wants to affirm them. I want to encourage and affirm you. As the Thessalonians were models for other believers, so too, we should be models for other believers.

Most of you know that our mission statement here at Emmaus Church is Preach, Teach, and Model a Life-Giving Gospel. There may be no better text to support this mission statement than this first chapter of Thessalonians. One commentator observed: “There’s no question that the quality of our lives is an

integral part of what we preach and teach.” Then we are called out to live what we preach and teach in order to bless others.

BODY:

Paul starts by greeting these faithful believers with the grace and peace of God. We pass easily over these huge words, grace and peace, because they are so familiar to us. In fact, they are each multiple sermons in themselves. Grace is the summation of God’s goodness and is arguably the defining characteristic of the Almighty. The peace of God is beyond understanding because when everything around you is screaming anxiety and disorder, the Holy Spirit within every believer whispers, “The Lord Jesus is on the throne.”

Then Paul sincerely tells them that we always thank God for you. These are not idle words by any means, which we know because later he repeats them. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NIV84) And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 1 Thessalonians 3:9 (NIV84) 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?

Like Paul, Silas, and Timothy, church leaders should be praying for each member of the congregation. Likewise, each member should be praying for the church leadership. And, they should be praying for fellow believers. Pray and keep praying. Jesus said, “My house, will be called a house of prayer.” My brothers and sisters, we are that house.

Too many Christians, in a desire to make converts, preach an easy faith. Just accept Jesus into your heart and your life will be great. Just sign this pledge card and you’ll get a free pass into heaven. They preach cheap grace. There is no talk of commitment; no talk of persecution; and, no talk of sacrifice. It is a faith that exists only in the mind. There is no need for the power of God the Holy Spirit to live it out.

Paul says, we continually remember your:

Work produced by **faith** (or work of faith) –

Labor prompted by **love** (or labor of love) – and

Endurance inspired by **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ -

This is a description of the Christian journey. It is Paul’s frequent reference to the trilogy of faith, hope, and love. We are to be people of action, working out our faith with fear and trembling as God works in us and through us.

Paul presents a hierarchy of modeling. Of course, the Lord Jesus is preeminent, of prime importance, and the perfect example or model for us. Church leaders are to be diligent in our efforts to be Christ-like. We, leaders and followers, need each other to encourage and exhort one another. When church leaders model a life-giving gospel, then the whole body follows more faithfully than they could on their own. Finally, a local church that works, labors, and endures in faith, love, and hope is an encouragement to other churches. Truly, it is a city on a hill and the light to the world.

What are the results of this modeling? It is not all peaches and cream. It is not all ice cream and caviar. The reality is that the Thessalonians had to go through severe suffering. They were in the minority. Family, friends, and most of society were hostile to them. Why? Because not only were they different, but their difference challenged the status quo. They believed in this strange Jesus who they claimed was killed on a cross and yet was raised from the dead. And, this was the work of the One and only true God. When these new Christians turned away from their idols, their lives changed. They talked about a strange thing, being born again; being born from above; being born of the water and the Spirit of God. More than that, they became new creations living in a new way. Not only did they reject the commonly accepted practices of the day, they formed this new strange community. See how they love one another. They were people of The Way.

On top of all that, even though they were ostracized and persecuted, they didn’t seem to mind very much. They called it joy. How in the midst of all their trials and tribulations could they be so contented?

They had a special peace with a smile. Joy, joy. Circumstances could not steal their joy. It was contagious.

The Lord's message was trumpeted by the Thessalonians. It rang out and reverberated. The message was on their lips but more importantly it resonated in the way they lived. A trumpet gets your attention. It is loud and clear. Alexander MacClaren pointed out that a trumpet requires breath. And the reason that the Thessalonian trumpet was so powerful was because the breath was the Holy Spirit of God. Their faith in God became known everywhere. They became effective witnesses for the gospel of God. Yes, they were witnesses, examples, imitators, models of the Lord Jesus. People knew of their persecution, their joy, their endurance, their new way of living. It spoke volumes. In fact, it was a package of which every part was necessary.

In Paul's day, the early Christians looked at the world and did not doubt that a Savior was needed. The sin was so obvious that the wrath of God was certainly just around the corner. Everywhere you looked, the darkness of the human heart was being inflamed by the demons of the Devil. My friends, this sounds like our culture to me.

And yet, the Thessalonians had a great hope. Jesus was coming back. The Lord promised. The angels at the ascension of Jesus promised. Awaiting the return of the resurrected Jesus with his angels was a great faith focusing telescope.

The Rapture of the Church could come today. There is no time to waste. May our trumpet of salvation through our Savior blast boldly to a sick and dying world. Come Lord Jesus, come!

Now, I want to share a special example of a Christ honoring life:

Desmond Thomas Doss was a model for living out his faith. He was born in Lynchburg, VA on February 7, 1919. His family was poor, especially during the depression. His father didn't handle it well and took to heavy drinking. His mother was a devout Christian and she raised the children in the 7th Day Adventist Church. This denomination is known for its Saturday observance of the Sabbath and the prominence in their theology of the 2nd Coming of Christ.

One night, Desmond's father was drinking with his wife's brother. As often happens with drinking men, an argument ensued. It got entirely out of hand when Desmond's father grabbed a gun and threatened to kill the uncle. Desmond's mother stepped between them. She warned them that the police were on the way and she demanded her husband to give her the gun.

When that happened, she gave the gun to Desmond and told him to get rid of it. When he returned home, the police were taking his father off to jail. Desmond never wanted to touch a gun again in his life.

As an older teenager, the family heard an appeal on the radio. A woman had been in an accident and badly needed blood to survive. Desmond walked three miles to the hospital to donate blood and then walked the three miles back home. A few days later, the appeal went out again over the radio, and Desmond repeated the trip.

"Desmond had been raised with a fervent belief in the Bible. When it came to the Ten Commandments, he applied them personally. During childhood his father had purchased a large framed picture at an auction. It portrayed the Ten Commandments with colorful illustrations. Next to the words, "Thou shalt not kill" was a drawing of Cain holding a club and standing over the body of his dead brother Abel. Little Desmond would look at that picture and ask, "Why did Cain kill Abel? How in the world could a brother do such a thing?" In Desmond's mind, God said, "If you love me, you won't kill." With that picture firmly embedded in his mind, he determined that he would never take life."

That determination would be severely tested.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Desmond was working as a joiner in the Newport News, VA shipyards. Because of the importance of this work, he was given a deferment from joining the military. Nevertheless, on April 1st, 1942 he volunteered for the US Army, hoping to serve as an Army combat medic. He felt compelled to serve his country and his God.

Two things made the Army more difficult for Desmond than it was for anyone else. He still refused to touch a weapon of war, so he had to have his Conscientious Objector status documented in his record. Normally, Conscientious Objectors were separated from normal Army duties, but to be a combat medic required Desmond to be fully integrated. Other medics carried a sidearm, but Desmond refused. The second issue for him was his insistence on his Saturday Sabbath. There might have been some tolerance of his religious practice if his Sabbath had been on a Sunday, but not in this case. There is a high level of conformity required at the platoon and company levels. Teamwork and trust are fundamental to their effectiveness and often meant life or death.

How could they trust this religious nut? Without a gun, how could he cover their back? He is not trying to fit in. They threatened him. They abused him. When he prayed they threw shoes at him. When he read his Bible, they mocked him. Some even said they would shoot him themselves if given the opportunity.

When there were dirty jobs to be given out, Desmond was at the top of the list. Some officers tried to get him transferred out of their unit. Other officers construed situations to find a cause to court martial him. One group of officers tried to discharge him under a Section Eight unfitness charge. They failed and Desmond persevered to become the best combat medic he could.

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, March 3, 1863, has awarded in the name of The Congress the **MEDAL OF HONOR** to

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS DESMOND T. DOSS
UNITED STATES ARMY

for service as set forth in the following

Citation: Private First Class Desmond T. Doss, United States Army, Medical Detachment, 307th Infantry, 77th Infantry Division. Near Urasoe-Mura, Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, 29 April – 21 May 1945. He was a company aid man when the 1st Battalion assaulted a jagged escarpment 400 feet high. As our troops gained the summit, a heavy concentration of artillery, mortar and machinegun fire crashed into them, inflicting approximately 75 casualties and driving the others back. Private First Class Doss refused to seek cover and remained in the fire-swept area with the many stricken, carrying them one by one (all 75 throughout the night) to the edge of the escarpment and there lowering them on a rope-supported litter down the face of a cliff to friendly hands.

On 2 May, he exposed himself to heavy rifle and mortar fire in rescuing a wounded man 200 yards forward of the lines on the same escarpment; and two days later he treated four men who had been cut down while assaulting a strongly defended cave, advancing through a shower of grenades to within eight yards of enemy forces in a cave's mouth, where he dressed his comrades' wounds before making four separate trips under fire to evacuate them to safety.

On 5 May, he unhesitatingly braved enemy shelling and small arms fire to assist an artillery officer. He applied bandages, moved his patient to a spot that offered protection from small-arms fire and, while artillery and mortar shells fell close by, painstakingly administered plasma. Later that day, when an American was severely wounded by fire from a cave, Private First Class Doss crawled to him where he had fallen 25 feet from the enemy position, rendered aid, and carried him 100 yards to safety while continually exposed to enemy fire.

On 21 May, in a night attack on high ground near Shuri, he remained in exposed territory while the rest of his company took cover, fearlessly risking the chance that he would be mistaken for an infiltrating Japanese and giving aid to the injured until he was himself seriously wounded in the legs by the explosion of a grenade. Rather than call another aid man from cover, he cared for his own injuries and waited five hours before litter bearers reached him and started carrying him to cover.

The trio was caught in an enemy tank attack and Private First Class Doss, seeing a more critically wounded man nearby, crawled off the litter and directed the bearers to give their first attention to the other man. Awaiting the litter bearers' return, he was again struck, this time suffering a compound fracture of one arm. With magnificent fortitude he bound a rifle stock to his shattered arm as a splint and then crawled 300 yards over rough terrain to the aid station.

Through his outstanding bravery and unflinching determination in the face of desperately dangerous conditions Private First Class Doss saved the lives of many soldiers. His name became a symbol throughout the 77th Infantry Division for outstanding gallantry far above and beyond the call of duty.



October 12, 1945

THE WHITE HOUSE

Let me tell you a little more about Desmond Doss. Before Okinawa, his bravery was exhibited in Guam and an island in the Philippines. Over and over again, he would go out into a raging battlefield and treat the wounded. Then he would drag them back to safety. He amazed his fellow soldiers with his bravery and his miraculous survival, time and again. He had even treated a Japanese soldier. Another Japanese soldier reported that he had Desmond in his sites, but every time he pulled the trigger the gun would jam.

He carried a small Bible everywhere and was known for it. On one particular day, Company A & B were sent out on separate missions. Doss was in Company B and asked if he could pray for the men before they left. Company A suffered heavy casualties. Company B suffered none! On another occasion, an attack was delayed on Okinawa until after Doss finished his Sabbath prayers.

After his injury, while on the medical evacuation ship, named Mercy, he realized he had lost his Bible. He sent a letter to Company B asking if anyone had it to please send it to him. They went out into an active battle zone and searched for his Bible until they found it.

CONCLUSION:

Desmond's mother was an imitator of the Lord Jesus. Desmond followed the example that his mother modeled for him. The example of Desmond Doss to believers and unbelievers alike has been recorded for all of us. His faith in God has become known everywhere. Though he would not carry a weapon, he carried a stretcher and his Bible through the hell of a vicious war. Desmond did so with power and assurance. With bullets, grenades, and mortars flying, he prayed, "Lord, let me save one more. One more Lord."

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV), Paul says, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Can we be so bold as to say that with Paul? Can we be so bold as to live that with Paul?

In 2006, the LORD Jesus called Desmond Doss home. The Lord's welcoming will be received by Desmond with more joy than when he was presented the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Harry S. Truman. Desmond was a faithful imitator of Jesus. He modeled a life-giving gospel. Can we make the same claim?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.