

I THESSALONIANS 1:7-8
GODLY WITNESS!
THEIR PRESENT LIFE!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 1 as we continue our study of Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. And as we have seen in our study of this letter, Paul loved them and prayed for them. He thanked God for these young believers.

And Paul shows us the power of the Gospel as it transformed their lives and that is what we will be looking at this morning, their "Godly Witness" in their "Present Life!"

Make no mistake about it, our life should change when we come to Christ and it should keep changing, we should be growing in the Lord. We should not be stagnant. Let me show you what I mean with this story. We are told,

A close friend of mine was asked back to his forty-year high school reunion. For months he saved to take his wife back to the place and the people he'd left four decades before. The closer the time came for the reunion, the more excited he became, thinking of all the wonderful stories he would hear about the changes and the accomplishments these old friends would tell him.

One night before he left he even pulled out his old yearbooks, read the silly statements and the good wishes for the future that students write to each other. He wondered what ol' Number 86 from his football team had done. He wondered if any others had encountered this Christ who had changed him so profoundly. He even tried to guess what some of his friends would look like, and what kind of jobs and families some of these special friends had. The day came to leave and I drove them to the airport. Their energy was almost contagious. "I'll pick you up on Sunday evening, and you can tell me all about it," I said. "Have a great time."

Sunday evening arrived. As I watched them get off the plane, my friend seemed almost despondent. I almost didn't want to ask, but finally I said, "Well, how was the reunion?" "Tim," the man said, "it was one of the saddest experiences of my life." "Good grief," I said, more than a little surprised. "What happened?" "It wasn't what happened but what didn't happen. It has been forty years, forty years – and they haven't changed. They had simply gained weight, changed clothes, gotten jobs . . . but they hadn't really changed. And what I experienced was maybe one of the most tragic things I could ever imagine about life. For reasons I can't fully understand, it seems as though some people choose not to change."

There was a long silence as we walked back to the car. On the drive home, he turned to me and said, "I never, never want that to be said of me, Tim. Life is too precious, too sacred, too important. If you ever see me go stagnant like that, I hope you give me a quick, swift kick where I need it – for Christ's sake. I hope you'll love me enough to challenge me to keep growing."

- Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat*, pp. 54-55

I don't think any of us want to be stagnant in our Christian walk. We want to grow, we want to mature in the faith. My prayer as we go through these verses this morning here in our study of I Thessalonians chapter 1 is that we would see what made these new believers so strong. And as you will see, what they took in was manifested outwardly in the things that they said, the things that they did. Their lives were witnesses of their faith!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 1 beginning in verse 7 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word this morning.

I THESSALONIANS 1

VERSE 7

Let me start off by saying this. I think what we see happening in verse 7 was born out of what took place in verse 6. Listen to what I Thessalonians 1:6 says, “**And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.**”

What we see here is that as they came to faith, as they received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior they patterned their life after Paul who patterned his life after Jesus. Thus, as they were following the example of Paul they were following Christ!

In I John 2:6 we are told, “**He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.**” Years ago we had that saying, WWJD or What Would Jesus Do? And it was an interesting idea but I think it did miss the point.

We don't have to guess because God's Word tells us what we are to do and what we are not to do. I realize that this phrase was to get us to think about what Jesus would do in various situations, but that should be a natural part of our lives. We should not have to think about it that much, we should just do it.

Working in the ICU or the Intensive Care Unit for a long time, when things went south or they got bad, I did not have to think about what I needed to do. You see, I knew what I needed to do. It, in a sense, came naturally because I studied and have been applying these things to my life for years. It just flowed from my life.

The same is true here. What we do and what we say should reflect the nature of Jesus because we have spent so much time with Him that is what flows from our lives! And as you study the Scriptures, it clearly shows us how Jesus walked. It is really very clear; the problem comes when we don't want to listen to what the Lord is telling us.

In Matthew 16:24-26 Jesus gives to us a description of what this walk is all about. We are told, **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”**

This is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Too often people don't count the cost, they do what they want when they want instead of following Jesus or walking as Jesus walked.

First of all, Jesus says that we must deny a life of self-centeredness. The only way that is going to happen is when you surrender your life to God. Look at the life of Jesus, He was others centered!

In Mark 10:45 we are told, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”** The Living Bible puts it like this, **“For even I, the Messiah, am not here to be served, but to help others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.”**

So to walk as Jesus walked we must be willing to be a servant of all. We are not to focus on our own interests but we are to focus upon the interests of others. Paul put it like this in Philippians 2:3-4, **“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”**

Back in verse 2 of Philippians chapter 2 Paul spoke of being **“like-minded”** and that phrase, **“by being like-minded”** in the Greek is HO AUTOS PHRONEO, (ho ow-tos’ fron-eh’-o) and it literally means “to think the same thing.”

And this is the key. You see, we are to think as God thinks in regards to things, to let His nature then flow from our lives. Paul put it this way in I Corinthians 2:16, **“For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”**

Thus, this is done as we read and study God’s Word and the Holy Spirit then opens us up to the things of God. We know the mind of God because it is God Himself who is teaching us these things!

Then Paul says all that we do is not to be done for **“selfish ambition or conceit.”** Think about it. Self-will is at the heart of every sin, it caused Lucifer to fall, it caused Adam and Eve to fall, and it remains at the forefront of sin today!

Paul then speaks of **“conceit”** and it comes from the Greek word KENODOXIA (ken-od-ox-ee’-ah) and it is formed by the adjective KENOS meaning “empty” and the noun DOXA which means, “glory.” Thus, it speaks of empty glory, vain glory, it is thinking too highly of yourself, it is an issue of pride!

Now Paul speaks on the positive side, with “**lowliness of mind.**” You see, how do you put away self-will and vain glory? By having humility of the mind and that will then be manifested in your actions.

In this position you place others above yourself, you are a servant of God. You see, as you have a humility of mind, you are going to be watching and helping others more than yourself, it would be impossible then to have strife and contention if that is our hearts focus.

If you want to walk as Jesus walked, then you must ***DENY YOURSELF!***

Then Jesus speaks of taking up your cross. And please understand that this is not speaking of your in-laws or your wife or your husband, like people like to say, “My wife is my cross to bear!” Not so!

You see, the cross spoke of death and thus, you must be willing to die for Him. Not that this will be required, but are you willing to lay down your life for Him. Are you willing to put to death those things that are hindering your relationship with Him?

It is as Paul said in Romans 8:16-18, “**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**” It is just a part of being His disciple!

If you want to walk as Jesus walked, then you must ***TAKE UP YOUR CROSS!***

And lastly, you must willingly and obediently follow after Him. That means are we willing to go where He is leading us? But what if I don’t want to go? You do have a choice but if you refuse you are missing out what is best for your life!

If you want to walk as Jesus walked, then you must ***FOLLOW JESUS!***

I realize that this may not be easy but listen to the example we have of the Creator of Heaven and Earth and what He did. Jesus said in John 6:38, “**For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.**” The pattern of Jesus’ life was one of obedience to the Father, a life of sacrifice, of dying to self that was born out of fellowship with the Father! How did Jesus do?

Jesus tells us in John 17:4, “**I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.**” He completed the work that He was sent to do!

Now in regards to this life of denying yourself, taking up your cross and following after Jesus, Arthur Pink wrote, “Growth in grace is growth downward; it is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves; it is a deepening realization of our nothingness; it is a heartfelt recognition that we are not worthy of the least of God’s mercies.”

If you like to satisfy the flesh now, you will die apart from Christ losing that everlasting life. That is what Jesus is saying in verse 25 of Matthew chapter 16. If you die to this life now, sacrificing all to follow Him, you will enter into life with Christ for eternity.

And verse 26 of Matthew chapter 16 is tough because man today tries to gain the world and in trying to do that he loses everything in regards to a relationship with Christ. This is not saying rich people are not saved, not at all. It is speaking of priorities and if you can’t fit Christ into your life, something is wrong. And really, we should not fit Christ into our life; He should be a part of our life every single day! People today are selling their souls for garbage and they will have an eternity to think about it! Count the cost and come to Christ!

We also see that they were examples of Paul, they followed his life examples because Paul was following the Lord. And out of this, they became examples to others.

Now look again at I Thessalonians 1:7, “**so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.**” You see this young church, only followers of Jesus for a short time, and yet their faith was real and they were examples, they encouraged other believers and word spread through the province of Macedonia or Northern Greece where Thessalonica, Philippi and Berea were located. Also to the province of Achaia or Southern Greece where Athens and Corinth were located.

Keep in mind that Thessalonica was a seaport city and it also had a main highway going through it, the Roman road or the Egnatian Way, therefore, word was able to spread quickly and for good, not of any wrong they were doing! What an example they were and may we do no less. May we be an example to others of the faith we have in Jesus!

The Greek word that Paul uses for “**example**” is TUPOS, (too’-pos) and it speaks of an impression left by a seal or die. This word later came to mean a pattern or model and that is how Paul used it here.

The lives of these believers in Thessalonica were a pattern for other Christians to follow and how was this seen in their lives. Paul tells us in I Thessalonians 1:6, that they received God’s Word with much affliction and joy, which don’t seem to go together but for the Christian, it does!

Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**”

What I want you to see here is that our witness is not going to be done in our own power or strength. It is the empowering of God's Spirit upon our lives that allows us to manifest these things. Yes, we must walk, take those steps of faith but that walk is done in the power of God's Spirit upon us, not apart from us!

And what is being spoken of here in Acts 1:8 is not going about and witnessing but that your life is a witness. I am not saying that we should not share our faith, there are other verses that speak of that, but not here in Acts 1:8.

And here is the problem for some. As you look at their lives, the things that they do and the things that they say, their witness is horrible. And to tell you the truth, there is no excuse. You see, these Thessalonian believers were young in the faith and yet their witness, their example of what a Christian is to be, was manifested in their lives and it encouraged other Christians in the faith!

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

Many historians believe that central to the rise of Christianity was the simple fact that Christians generously loved each other and their neighbours. They point out that in the ancient world mercy was widely seen as a character defect that ran counter to justice. Justice demanded people get what they deserved and was seen as appropriate, where mercy extended grace, love, and kindness to people who had done nothing to deserve it. Yet the Christians valued mercy. Christian communities became places where people tended to live longer and healthier lives, for when they suffered sickness, poverty or mishap they had brothers and sisters in Christ who provided for their need. And Christians extended love way beyond the boundaries of family and congregation to their pagan neighbours.

In 251 A.D. for example, a great plague struck the Greco-Roman world. Memories were revived of a plague a century earlier in which more than a third of the population died. Fear was everywhere. Those who could afford it fled to the countryside. Those who could not remained in the cities. When they went to the temples they found them empty, the priests having fled. The streets were filled with those who had become infected, their families left with no option but to push them out the door. Christian communities however took an entirely different approach. They saw it as their responsibility to love the sick and dying, so they took them into their homes and nursed them. This action meant that many people recovered who otherwise would have died. Historians suggest that elementary nursing could have reduced the mortality rate by as much as two thirds, but it also cost a number of Christian carers their lives.

In *The Early Church*, Henry Chadwick comments:

The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment 'see how these Christians love one another' (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death of labour in the mines, and social action in time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war.

So striking was the Christian commitment to generous love that when the fourth century Emperor Julian sought to restore paganism to the Empire he instructed the pagan priesthood to follow the example of the Christians:

Why, then, do we think that this is enough, why do we not observe that it is their [Christians] benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism [Julian's word for Christianity]? I believe that we ought really and truly to practice every one of these virtues. . . . For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.

- Historical data derived from Henry Chadwick, *The Pelican History of The Early Church* and Rodney Stark, *the Triumph of Christianity*

I don't think we realize the impact we have on people by the things we say and the things we do. Paul tells us that, "**You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.**"

II Corinthians 3:2-3.

Like it or not, people are reading our lives and we are letters, in a sense for them to read. We are letters that are showing people Jesus and the big question is, "What are they reading or what are they seeing in our lives?"

Remember when Stephen was martyred for his faith in Christ by the Jewish religious leaders in Acts chapter 7. Of this man named Stephen we are told that when they arrested him, that "**. . . all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.**" Acts 6:15.

What a beautiful picture. When people say things that we don't like, is that the picture of us they are seeing? It should be!

Then Stephen gives them a history lesson pointing them to Jesus and finally, in Acts 7:54 we see their response to what Stephen was telling them, "**When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.**"

I think they were a little upset with Stephen and the reason being was that they were so convicted that instead of repenting of their sin and coming to Jesus they lashed out at Stephen and it was not pretty!

And listen to what transpired in Acts 7:55-60, **“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”**

I hope you have seen this contrasting picture of Stephen and these religious leaders. Stephen had the face of an angel and these religious leaders who were coming after Stephen, looked like the Devil!

Now what I also want you to see here is the peace that Stephen had knowing he was going to die or I should say go home to be with Jesus. You see, Stephen had a deep, personal relationship with God and he had this love of God that was seen in the fact that he could forgive those who were doing this to him!

Also, we are told, **“And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”** This man named Saul would later in the Bible be known as Paul the apostle. But here he is consenting to the death of Stephen and what was Stephen doing? He was a witness of the living God, of Jesus. And Saul desired to have what Stephen had, this intimate relationship with God but that could never happen through the Law!

The Law kept you apart from God, just as we see when the Children of Israel were at Mount Sinai! They could not get close to God because their sins had separated them from God! And yet, by grace through faith in Jesus Stephen was able to approach the living God, not in his own righteousness but the righteousness that was imputed into his life by faith, the righteousness of Christ!

And what happened to Saul after this event. In Acts 8:1-4 we are told, “**Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.**”

So Saul went on a crusade to destroy Christianity and yet, as he was going out and arresting Christians, on the road to Damascus, God got a hold of his heart and he got saved! And I truly believe it was the witness of Stephen that kept gnawing at the heart of Saul and was preparing him for this encounter with God on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians.

What about your life? When people watch what you do, when they read your life, are they seeing Jesus? Is your life a witness of Jesus? It should be. The reason it might not be is this. It is as Jesus said, “**If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.**”

Let me share how these men were willing to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus. This is from Wes Bentley from Far Reaching Ministries and we are told,

I was in Russia with our team celebrating the Eastern Orthodox Christmas on the 7th of January. We were celebrating with one of the churches when I received a call from Michael, our senior chaplain. He called to inform me of the deaths of two of our men, Gabriel Manyoun and John Deng. Gabriel had graduated in 2015, from the chaplaincy training program, and John was being field trained by Gabriel and would have been part of class eleven.

Michael shared this news that had come in from the front where one of the forward military units had been overrun by the enemy. From what we understand, there were wounded and dying men everywhere. Gabriel and John ran up trying to save other men's lives when they were ambushed and killed, or so we thought. However, when the military was able to retake the overrun position, they found that John was still alive though he was critically wounded. He was transported to a hospital for treatment, but the medical care at the front is ill equipped to care for critically wounded patients and far from what you would find in the western world. I know from my experience that John's chances of survival were not good, but we prayed and hoped God would intervene. As a war zone, South Sudan is a very dangerous and hard place. Around the 21st of January, word came informing us that John had succumbed to his wounds and went home to be with the Lord. This was a difficult way to start the new year, but this was only the beginning.

On the 23rd of January, Michael called to inform me that Chaplain Peter Longar had been captured by the enemy and he was burned alive. He was on his way home to see his wife and two daughters, when he fell into the hands of the enemy. What happened next, we can only speculate. When his remains were found, he had been bound and had firewood around his body. He was doused with fuel and lit ablaze.

Peter had graduated in June of 2015. He had been in the field a little over a year before he was killed. In the last 16 years, we have lost a total of 32 staff who have given their lives in the service of Christ. It is a hard fact to realize that we are no closer to this war ending.

Sadly, this is going to go on. Yet, despite all the hardship we are seeing many souls won for Christ.

The day I found out about Peter's death, I just had to go home. The loss of too many men in too short of a time was overwhelming. I needed to be alone with the Lord and with my thoughts. Peter's death was very difficult to handle because of the brutality of the nature in which he was killed. I shared this news with a few friends and Ken Graves sent me a message and I felt it was appropriate. He said that may you and I also go out in the same blaze of glory. It made me realize for a moment of pain, he will wear the robes of a martyr and a crown of glory for eternity.

[This is the testimony of Peter Longar]

I came to the chaplains training program because Chaplain Peer Akech preached the Gospel of God to me and disciple me. He taught me Matthew 11:28 and he demonstrated daily how to love Jesus with all my strength. I wanted this same commitment in my heart. I joined the church and followed the examples I was given. As I came to learn the Word of God and began to go and proclaim to other soldiers, I realized God had a plan for my life.

When I arrived at the chaplain base, I was still shallow and selfish. I was not a good person. I told everyone that I was only going to stay for two weeks. God had one of the teachers share from Matthew 11:28, and my heart broke before God.

Suddenly, God's peace was upon me and my heart became transformed. Christ changed me. I thank God for increasing His Word in my heart through the chaplaincy program. I am so glad He kept me in the program.

I have two brothers and two sisters. My parents are still alive. My mother and father are born-again, and so are my two sisters and one of my brothers. My wife's name is Bati. God blessed us with my two daughters, and I think God will give us another child. I ask for prayer for my ministry and for my family; especially for my brother who is an unbeliever in Christ.

Peter's favorite Scripture was Matthew 11:28:

"Come to Me, all [you] who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

- Wes Bentley, Far Reaching Ministries, March 2017

These men sacrificed their lives for the Lord. They counted the cost and their lives are examples to others of what true sacrifice is all about. It reminds me of Paul who was encouraging Timothy to continue on in the faith, to finish the race strong. Paul knew his life was coming to an end, he was going to be put to death for his faith by Nero. And he wanted to encourage Timothy, using his life as an example for him, to continue on and to continue on strong!

And what I want you to notice about Chaplain Peter Longar was that he was not only disciplined and followed the examples that were given to him by other Christian men but now his life is a witness to others even though it was short on this earth!

I realize as you look at your life you might not want to be an example but make no mistake about it, by being a Christian you are not only witnessing to the unsaved but you are an example to the saved.

Therefore, we must be willing to follow the Lord, lay down our lives to be used by Him for His glory. Remember what Jesus said, **“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”** May we follow Christ and be that example to others!

VERSE 8

Paul tells us that **“the word of the Lord has sounded forth”** and that phrase, **“sounded forth”** means “a loud ringing sound, as of a trumpet blast.” Their lives were a living example of what it meant to be a Christian and as people saw what happened to them, word spread of their love for the Lord Jesus Christ! It blasted forth!

And keep in mind that Thessalonica was a major city with the seaport bringing ships in and the Egnatian Way or Roman highway you might say going through Thessalonica, many people traveled through this city and saw what was going on in these young believer’s lives!

Then, as they traveled back home word spread of what was going on in Thessalonica and thus, the Gospel message was also being spread because of the witness of these believer’s. Their lives were like a trumpet blast for Jesus you might say.

In fact, Paul tells us that their witness has sounded forth so strongly **“that we do not need to say anything.”** In other words, Paul is saying of these Thessalonian believer’s, “You guys are sounding forth the Word of God so strongly that we do not need to say anything more. You witness is that strong!

I like that. People were telling Paul what was going on in Thessalonica, the witness they had for the Lord. He did not have to tell them! It is as Clarke tells us, “The mere *preaching* of the Gospel has done much to convince and convert sinners; but the *lives* of the sincere followers of Christ, as *illustrative* of the truth of these doctrines, have done much more.”

I don’t think we understand how important our witness, our example is towards people. We can share our faith, share the Gospel all we want but unless our lives match what we are saying, those words end up being empty.

In fact, as we will see next time, their lives were transformed by God! Look at what we see in I Thessalonians 1:9 about their changed lives. We are told, “**For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.**”

The Living Bible puts this verse like this, “**for they keep telling us about the wonderful welcome you gave us, and how you turned away from your idols to God so that now the living and true God only is your Master.**”

It is as Spurgeon wrote, “Everybody asked, ‘Why, what has happened to these Thessalonians? These people have broken their idols: they worship the one God; they trust in Jesus. They are no longer drunken, dishonest, impure, contentious.’ Everybody talked of what had taken place among these converted people. Oh, for conversions, plentiful, clear, singular, and manifest; that so the word of God may sound out! Our converts are our best advertisements and arguments.”

Make no mistake about it, changed lives and personal testimonies have always been the Gospel's most effective evangelistic tools! Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

A time-honored, effective method of evangelism is your personal testimony. Just telling about your spiritual pilgrimage. The skeptic may deny your doctrine or attack your church, but he cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been cleaned up and revolutionized.

Now, I'm not talking about some stale, dragged-out verbal marathon. That kind of testimony never attracted anyone! I'm speaking of an effective, powerful missile launched from your lips to the ears of the unsaved. Consider these five suggestions:

1. *You want to be listened to, so be interesting.* It's a contradiction to talk about how exciting Christ really is in an uninteresting way. Remember to guard against religious clichés, jargon, and hard-to-understand terminology. Theologians, beware!

2. *You want to be understood, so be logical.* Think of your salvation in three phases and construct your testimony accordingly: (a) before you were born again - the struggles within, the loneliness, lack of peace, absence of love, unrest, and fears; (b) the decision that revolutionized your life; and (c) the change - the difference it has made since you received Christ.

3. *You want the moment of your new birth to be clear, so be specific.* Don't be vague. Speak of Christ, not the church. Emphasize faith more than feeling. Be simple and direct as you describe what you did or what you prayed or what you said. This is crucial!

4. *You want your testimony to be used, so be practical.* Be human and honest as you talk. Don't promise, "All your problems will end if you will become a Christian," for that isn't true. Try to think as unbelievers think.

5. *You want your testimony to produce results, so be warm and genuine.* A smile breaks down more barriers than the hammer blows of cold, hard facts. Let your enthusiasm flow freely. It's hard to convince someone of the sheer joy and excitement of knowing Christ if you're wearing a face like a jail warden. Above all, be positive and courteous. Absolutely refuse to argue. Nobody I ever met was "arm wrestled" into the kingdom. Insults and put-downs turn people off.

Ask God to open your lips and honor your words . . . but be careful! Once your missile hits the target, you'll become totally dissatisfied with your former life as an earthbound, secret-service saint.

- <http://www.jesus.org/following-jesus/evangelism-and-missions/how-can-your-testimony-help-you-evangelize.html>

And I will add one more point to this. Your testimony has to be short. Just one or two minutes at the most. You can't go on for thirty minutes with your testimony, you will lose them! So take the time and put together your testimony, how you came to the Lord because that is a witness of what God has done.

But let me also say this, and I realize that I have said it before, your life is a witness of what you believe. The things that you say, the things that you do, the things you post on Facebook! I have to admit that I am shocked by some of the things that are put on Facebook by Christians. If unbelievers read what they have posted, and I am sure they have unbelieving friends, then what they are reading is a horrible witness of Christ!

And I think we should have unbelieving friends on Facebook. Why? Because what we say on Facebook is a witness to them of what we believe. How we handle things is a witness of what we believe!

Let me give you this example to show you what I mean. We are told,

Near the Kingsport Press in Tennessee a southbound bus makes a scheduled midday stop of twenty minutes so that passengers may freshen up and get a bite to eat. One driver said, as he brought his bus to a stop: “Folks, we’ll be stopping here for twenty minutes. This line makes it a strict policy never to recommend an eating place by name, but if anybody wants me while we’re here, I’ll be eating a wonderful T-bone steak with French fries at Tony’s first-class, spotlessly clean diner directly across the street.”

Indirect advertising is indeed important and often more effective than the direct pitch. So is the indirect witness for Christ. The believer who reveals Christ by the way he lives, moves, walks, talks, eats, reads, pays his bills, keeps his garden free of weeds and a thousand other details of life, will probably do more than the fanatic with the sandwich board that reads, “Prepare to meet thy God.”

- Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Timeless Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, p. 265

Now please, don’t come to the conclusion that I am saying we are not to witness. Not at all. And I have said that already but I want to make that clear. But as we talk with people, how we treat people, how we live out our faith many times is an open door so we can then share the Gospel message.

I have seen Christians arguing with unsaved and I will tell you this, you will never argue someone into the Kingdom of God! If people don’t want to hear what you have to say, then don’t keep speaking with them, move on.

I remember my wife having an encounter with a woman in Minnesota. My wife was going to Mayo Clinic and she was with a friend sitting on a bench, waiting for a bus to come. And there was this woman who was there also and she started talking to Julie and was complaining about men and where do you go to find a good man today.

My wife shared with her that the best place to find a good man is church. And then she shared with her about Jesus! You would have thought that Julie was threatening to kill her. She went ballistic and said something to the effect, "I didn't ask you about Jesus. I heard Jesus so many times lately I don't want to hear about Him anymore!"

I think the Holy Spirit hit a nerve with this woman, don't you! Julie told her that is all she had to offer her and left it at that. What is funny is that as they got on the bus there were only two seats left and one was with Julie and the other was with this creepy looking guy. Guess which one this lady went to? Yes, you got it, the creepy looking guy. She did not want to sit next to Julie because she did not want to hear anymore of Jesus.

I don't know what happen to this woman but I see that the Holy Spirit was not only convicting her of sin but revealing Jesus to her and she kept rejecting Him. I pray that she has come to saving faith!

That does happen but don't let it stop you from being a witness. I don't know why, but for some reason, when I start talking with people, they pour out their lives to me. People I don't even know. And some of it is very personal and yet, they feel comfortable in doing that.

I am grateful for the opportunity to hear their problems and then being able to point them to the One who can handle their problems, Jesus. You see, we need to be approachable. People should feel comfortable coming to us. And I believe, as we draw close to the Lord, as we follow His example, we will be approachable to people and they will feel free to share what is going on in their heart and we can pray for them and share with them Jesus!

I see that here with the Thessalonians. People were coming and going from that city and as they came, they heard about Jesus and they saw the love these Thessalonian believers had. And as they left, they left seeing the power of God at work in their lives and I am sure many came to saving faith and they took that faith with them to their homes, their families and their friends where they lived!

And keep in mind that they were not only witnesses to unbelievers, but through their faith, their endurance through difficult times, they were an encouragement to other believers who were also going through difficult times.

Make no mistake about it. We should be examples to unbelievers and believers. Our life should be a witness wherever we go. We are not Christians or followers of Christ on Sunday mornings but every day of the week. We are followers of Christ through the easy times and the difficult times.

Paul put it like this in Hebrews 12:1-3, **“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”**

The witnesses that Paul is talking about here are the men and women who walked by faith, looking to the promise of the coming Messiah, endured all kinds of tribulation, even death for their faith, and yet they stayed the course. We are to look to them as examples of what faith looks like in a believer to encourage us to go on and we are to keep our eyes focused on Jesus, the Messiah who has come and is the Author and Finisher of our faith!

Don't be discouraged in what comes your way, keep your eyes on the Lord and know that the work He has begun in you He will complete! And I think, in knowing that, we can stay the course, we can finish the race and we can be examples to others what a walk of faith is all about, encouraging them to continue on or come to the faith, enter the race that is before them by coming to Jesus!

Next time, as we continue looking at the faith of these Thessalonian believer's, we will look at their past life, not to lift it up, but to show where they came from and where they are now at. It truly speaks of the transforming power of God in their lives!

As I close this morning, let me leave you with these closing remarks. We are told regarding this faith,

This is a joy that will see us through trials and tribulations, and even through death. There is no message in this world for the sting of death, and that is where the rubber meets the road for Christians. That is where our faith will be tested because the message of the gospel is a message that will bring hope in the face of death, and these Christians in Thessalonica could face death for the gospel.

This is why Paul says, “Imitate me as I imitate Jesus, even if that means picking up your cross and dying, because in doing so you are following your Savior, Jesus Christ.” The Lord is working out his life in us, and the Lord’s life is being reflected in our lives as we testify to the reality of a different world that is far beyond the joys and hopes and promises of this world. This is a heavenly joy and a heavenly hope, a hope that one day God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and make all things new. That is what Paul called them (and us) to imitate, and that is only possible because we have the good news of the gospel, the good news of a kingdom that will never end.

- James H. Grant Jr, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, p. 50

May we be examples of Him, witnesses of Him wherever we go, whatever we are doing. May people see Jesus in us because we are following after Him and desire to have what we have

– *JESUS!*