

# Living Messages

October 19 • 2008

## Focus Scripture 1 Thessalonians

1:1–10

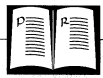
Additional Scriptures

Exodus 33:12–23

Psalms 99

Matthew 22:15–22

Compassionate God, we rejoice in your call to be living messages of your love. Strengthen our willingness to proclaim your good news in word and deed, as bold imitators of Jesus the Christ. Amen.



Replacement biblical background page for Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican congregations using the paired reading stream of the Revised Common Lectionary is on the Congregational Life Paired Reading CD.

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

Like our faith ancestors in Israel and Thessalonica, we are called each day to choose God over “idols” that seek our allegiance. Each day we are called to serve God and neighbour. As we make God’s story our story, we are fashioned as living messages of God’s good news for others. We are shaped for living as disciples in community with God’s people.

## Focus Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

We continue exploring Paul’s writings this week with the letter to the young church in Thessalonica, capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. The church in Thessalonica probably had been together for a year or less. Imagine what it might have been like to be the first followers of Jesus within the world of Roman power and religion.

Not only is this church freshly born, so is the “theologian” Paul. This letter reveals Paul’s forging of a new faith language in conversation with the community. Like most good theology, Paul’s words come from personal struggle to be faithful to Christ in daily life. Terms that may seem familiar to us – such as *gospel*, *salvation*, and *second coming* – were first used in this letter.

The “persecution” – the Greek word *thlipsis* also can be translated “struggles” – that Paul mentions in verse 6 probably was not official persecution, as there weren’t enough Christians to matter to the government. Paul likely is referring to the deeper, daily challenge to remain faithful amid temptations to conform to the surrounding culture.

Paul’s readers had done a remarkable thing in the midst of Roman culture: they “turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God” (v. 9). The thrust of Paul’s letter, and the focus of our passage, celebrates this turning. The Thessalonians were examples to others in the region by their Spirit-derived joy in the midst of competing cultural expectations. They maintained their faith, hope, and love in a hostile environment. In doing so, they became living messages – the embodiment of God’s good news in Christ.

The central message of this letter is the “lordship of Jesus Christ,” rather than the lordship of the emperor. This phrase is used eleven times in the let-

ter. Paul affirms the Christian community in Thessalonica, and urges them to stay faithful to Christ in the midst of the surrounding Roman culture. The steadfastness in faith exhibited by this tiny community in Christ remains a testament for us today. From the Thessalonians we can learn to claim our place in the story of Christ and trust in God alone when other voices are calling for our allegiance.

The people of Israel in the wilderness also heard other voices calling for their allegiance. Moses wondered if he was leading the people in God’s way, and asked for affirmation. In **Exodus 33:12–23**, God reassures: “You have found favour in my sight and I know you by name” (verse 17).

God exerts exclusive claim on us. **Psalm 99** sings exultant praise of God’s greatness and presence. With hindsight, we know that Jerusalem and the temple were not of ultimate importance in God’s plan. Likewise, our church buildings or institutions do not lay exclusive claim to God.

In response to those trying to test him, Jesus’ words in **Matthew 22:15–22** challenge hearers to consider the messages that their lives proclaim. We, too, are living messages, proclaiming each day to whom or to what we give our work, our money, our time, and our allegiance.

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We are invited to become living messages of God’s good news in an often hostile and resistant world. As we continue to explore new patterns for living as disciples, we affirm and encourage one another in lives of faith that serve as a witness to others. In what ways are you already the message of faith for others? How might God be calling you and your church to become living messages for someone new?

