

### Reading Schedule for July 23-29, 2018

We will spend the whole week in 1 Thessalonians. This seems like a very relevant letter to me. This talks about the challenges of life and the anticipation of Christ's return. There are almost a dozen specific references to remaining hopeful for Christ's return. By chapter 4 we learn the specifics of how Christ will return and what it will mean to believers. Paul is helping them to endure during the challenging launch of the church in Thessalonica.

**July 23 - 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8:** “. . . so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.” (v.8) Paul is emphasizing the importance of the relational aspect of his ministry to them. It is stressing the sincerity and selflessness of those missionaries who influenced the Thessalonian believers in the formation of the church and their receptivity to the Gospel. It is very descriptive to refer to one's ministry as a nursing mother taking care of her children. He affirms the importance of affection, as well as personal involvement in their lives. We refer to ministry as “life on life.” The exchange of ideas is less influential in a world of constant information. The most impacting endeavor is to share your life with others and develop a genuine connection of friendship. Paul exemplifies this, and we are called to do the same. What stands out to you in this short reading about Paul's ministry, as well as the ministry of those who partnered with him?

**July 24 - 1 Thessalonians 2:9-16:** “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.” (v.13) Paul affirms the genuine response of the believers in Thessalonica. They were like the fourth soil who received the Word and it began to multiply a hundred, sixty or thirty times, just as Jesus presented in The Parable of the Sower of the Seeds. They put their trust in the Word of God and were willing to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ. The message of the Gospel is not manmade. It is the power of God unto Salvation. We learn in Romans that the Gospel is the essential message of the whole book, so that we are unashamed to share it often and with great passion. Paul congratulates them for being genuine recipients of the good news. How fertile is the soil of your heart these days as God desires to multiply his message through you?

**July 25 - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13:** “But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.” (3:6) I appreciate the Apostle Paul's affirmation of others who partnered with him for the Gospel. Timothy is one such example. Paul could not do his missionary work without coworkers. Timothy represented Paul in every way. He was sent by Paul, motivated by the Holy Spirit, to strengthen this new church plant. We cannot do our ministry alone. The Bible is full of the significance regarding partnerships, even as Jesus sent out his disciples two by two. Also in these verses is this marvelous prayer found in verses 11-13 that you could easily duplicate concerning your heart for family and friends who need to be strengthened in the Lord. Do you know people who are drifting in their relationship with Christ? I encourage you to pray this prayer on their behalf.

**July 26 - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12:** “Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does

not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.” (v.8) It seems clear that sexual immorality was as prevalent in the pagan world of Paul's day as it is in our world today. One of the key concerns of the early church was the sexually promiscuous world that had such a grip on the people who were responding to the Gospel. For these former pagans, the lure of sexual sin was especially strong. Paul, as well and throughout the Bible, forbids any sexual activity outside the bonds of heterosexual marriage. He emphasizes holiness and warns them about the lustful passions of the heart that have dominated their life. They are now called to sanctification through the Holy Spirit with a new way of living that is pure and honoring to God. Paul calls on the Thessalonians to please God by living in holiness and love. How do you respond to these challenging words that point to a life that is pleasing to God?

**July 27 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:** “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” (v.17) We know this section as the main teaching for the Rapture. The Greek word “caught up” means to grab or seize suddenly; to snatch or take away, and gives a sense of being suddenly lifted upward. The word “meet” is often used as highlighting an important reception of honoring a dignitary to one's city. The idea is to come out to greet and welcome their honored guest with celebration and fanfare. The sequence of these events has been debated, but the strong theme of Christ's return is affirmed throughout God's Word. How do these verses encourage you?

**July 28 - 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11:** “. . . for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” (v.2) The phrase “day of the Lord” is common to the Bible and highlighted many times throughout the Scriptures. It refers to the great and terrible day when Yahweh will intervene to punish the disobedient who have rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ. At this point there will be separation of the sheep and the goats, and the wrath of God will be released on the unbelieving world. Followers of Christ will be saved from the wrath and receive salvation because of their relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no need to fear this final judgment because Christ has promised us deliverance, salvation and eternal life with him forever. How do you respond to this message that highlights the culmination of the age?

**July 29 - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28:** “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (v.23) We previously studied Romans this last school year and learned much about sanctification. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. By and large, it is a progressive work that forms the likeness of Christ in a believer's life, step by step. As our relationship with the Lord deepens and our heart to obey expands, we experience the work of the Holy Spirit in increased measure. However, if we quench the Spirit, and become lax in our response to God, our spiritual growth will be impeded. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live a life that is pleasing to God and looks more like Jesus every day. How do you respond to these final words of instruction and challenge?

**PRAYER: Pray for the continued sanctification of the followers of Christ that form the church family we call New Harvest.**