

Perspective is everything.

Perspective is the lens through which we view life.

*Today's passage from 1 Thessalonians models a Godly perspective.*

People who have grasped the goodness of God are transformed in how they think and how they act.

How do you see your own life?

Are you visibly displaying God's perspective in your transformation? Or ...

Is it more common that we are disappointed, or alarmed, by how we do not live as we should, in view of God's perspective, either privately or before others?

Today is a challenge and a reminder to be encouraged!  
God is transforming us to give us joy!

**(Verse 6)** *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."*

The Ancient Greeks and Romans deeply appreciated the value of imitating 'model lives' as a means of moral education.

In the New Testament there are repeated exhortations to imitate Jesus, the leaders of the church and members of the community of faith.

For Paul, suffering was an expected part of discipleship, but he adds that although it is true that believers will experience trouble in the world, they also know joy, because they know the character of God. When the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts, we experience joy.

**What does joy look like?** Joy is a settled emotional state of contentment, cultivated by intimacy with God.

I think of my own life, from 2018 to today and much has changed. Many circumstances were out of my control, and this made the particular time in my life difficult. I struggled to find joy.

Do you relate to a time in your life like this? Do you experience joy, despite your circumstances?

If not, allow the Holy Spirit to minister to you.

Let me jump to (Psalm 9 verse 7), *"The LORD reigns forever"*. God is a forever God. He is permanent. He does not change.

The past years have been a reminder of our fragility and vulnerability.

God's permanent love is a great reminder that the only permanence we are promised is the permanence of God. Even in difficult times, seek joy because God is faithful.

This is **good news**.

When everything else around you seems unstable, God *is* stable.

He sits enthroned forever, and he judges the world with righteousness and fairness.

We can *thank* him that He does not change like vulnerable people in a fragile world.

**(Psalm 9 verses 9-10)** says, *“The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.*

*Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.”* Praise God!

Similarly, **(Psalm 46)** starts, *“God is our ever-present help in times of trouble.*

*Therefore, we will not fear.*

*Be still, and know that I am God;”* **(Verses 1-2; 10)**. Ever-present.

What a great description of God.

He is ever-present with you and everyone else in the world *at the same time*. “Omnipresence” is another word used to describe this ever-presence of God. God’s omnipresence gives us assurance. This is where joy is rediscovered. The Thessalonians understood these truths and were thankful to God. They found joy in their relationship with Him.

**(Verse 7)** *“And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”*

The Thessalonians had first followed the pattern of the apostles and the Lord, and then had themselves become patterns for others to follow. High praise indeed.

Macedonia was in the north, and Thessalonica itself was within this province. Achaia was in the south, several weeks’ journey away by land or sea. Paul had left Thessalonica a matter of months earlier, and yet the transformation of the people there had already reached places such as Athens and Corinth.

Stott<sup>1</sup> says of this passage:

*“Four new relationships seem to be implied –*

- *the opposition of the world,*
- *the joy of the Holy Spirit,*
- *the imitation of the Lord and his apostles, and*
- *being a model to the rest of the church.*

*If the preachers were marked by truth, conviction and power, the converts were marked by joy, courage and obedience.”*

**(Verse 8)** *“The 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”*

*“The Lord’s message”.*

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<sup>1</sup> John Robert Walmsley Stott CBE was a British Anglican priest and theologian who was noted as a leader of the worldwide evangelical movement.

The word of the Lord.

Although this precise phrase is rare, Paul uses several similar expressions ‘the word’, ‘the word of God’, ‘the gospel of God’, and the idea is especially clear in the first two chapters of this letter to the Thessalonians. It emphasises the belief that the message the early Christians proclaimed, was not from human wisdom, but from God.

This message *“rang out from you”*.

The Thessalonians, new and persecuted believers as they were, had set an example to other churches by their clear declaration of God’s word.

The expression ‘rang out from you’ suggests a pealing bell or the call of a trumpet.

The Thessalonian Christians were not quiet and timid. They were on the front foot.

They trusted the Lord’s message and lived it in word and deed.

The evangelised became evangelists. People saw the difference in this community of believers, its bold rejection of idolatry, its joy in the midst of opposition, its transformed values, its faith and love. People didn’t just hear the Gospel message; they could see transformed lives.

We discussed this back in January: Evangelism is everyone’s business.

It is both our responsibility and our privilege to share the message of salvation and hope that Christ Jesus offers.

*“Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,” (Verse 8)*

Paul could be saying that he did not need to preach the gospel in certain places because the Thessalonians had already done this effectively. Paul could also mean that he does not need to say anything about their faith because the results of their faith are apparent for all to see.

The application is clear for us.

**(Verse 9)** *“for 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”*

*“They themselves report what kind of reception you gave us,”*

The apostles were embraced by the Thessalonian church because they faithfully had turned to God and were joyfully living their hope in the Gospel.

*“You turned to God from idols” (verse 9)*

There were very few people at this time who did not follow some god or gods.

Such idolatry was part of the social and political climate and so to let go of these gods would be contrary to the expected norm.

This may be one of the reasons the church was facing persecution. The church did not confuse their faith with old loyalties or traditions. They took the radical step of abandoning those gods that were part of their family and their community. It is still a challenge to not follow the expected social or traditional norms.

We must not confuse our faith: Grace alone, faith alone.

*“It is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ in which the spell of the idol is broken, and the superior power of the living and true God is demonstrated.”* (Stott)

What idols do we need to turn away from? Where your treasure is, there your heart is also.

*“To serve the living and true God,”* **(verse 9)**

Note the *negative* – ‘you turned...from idols’, and the *positive* – ‘to serve the living and true God’. The description of God as ‘the living and true’ stands in contrast to the idols, who are lifeless and false.

Jesus is spoken of in the same breath as ‘the living and true God’, but He is the One whom we wait for, whom God has raised from the dead, who rescues us.

**(Verse 10)** *“and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”*

*“To wait for his Son from heaven”*

The idea is of waiting patiently and expectantly. However, it is not a passive waiting: it is linked to their moral life and to their behaviour in the face of persecution.

Much is implied in this statement. Jesus is God’s Son.

His coming *from* heaven confirms his previous ascension *to* heaven. The hope of Christ’s return is an integral part of our faith.

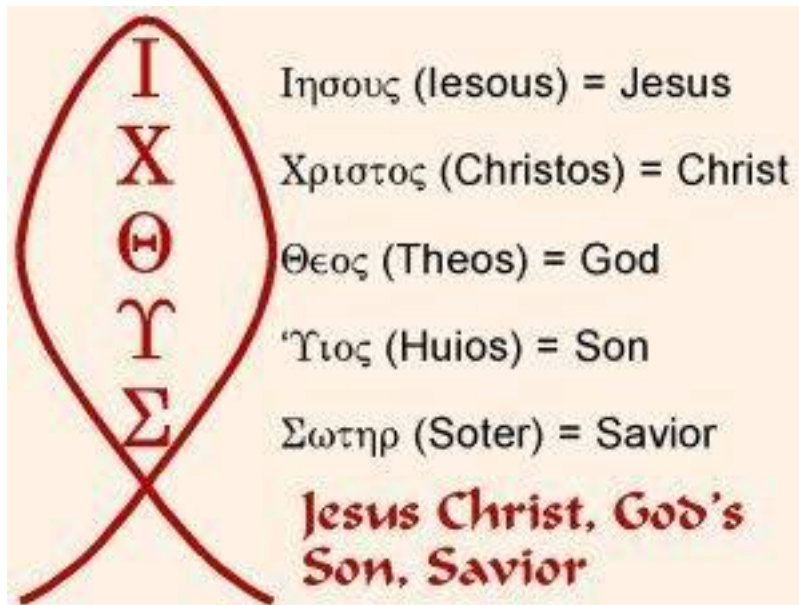
Do we share Paul’s hope as we wait patiently for the return of God’s Son from heaven? A church who lives in the expectation of seeing Jesus at any time, will be a vibrant and joyful group of people. Expecting the Lord’s return is a great motivation to share Christ and live as transformed people.

*“Whom he raised from the dead-”* **(verse 10)**

It is a mark of the centrality of Jesus’ death and resurrection that even when Paul is thinking of the second coming, he refers to Christ as the One Whom God raised from the dead.

*“Who rescues us”* **(verse 10)**

Here Paul refers to Jesus, God’s Son, our Saviour.



<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/ichthus/>

In the Greek acrostic, ICHTHUS, the word for fish, the early Christians chose this as their symbol.

*“The coming wrath.” (verse 10)*

This is our salvation, won by Jesus. It is the hope of eternity with God. The focus here is not on the Thessalonian believers’ final glory, but on the final destruction of all who ignore the call of Christ. We have a good God who is totally opposed to evil. If you are in a difficult situation, if evil is being done towards you, God is totally opposed to this. He wants to shower you with His love and goodness.

Paul was convinced that the Thessalonian church were imitators of the Lord, joyful in the Holy Spirit, enthusiastic in sharing the Gospel and expectant of Christ’s return. They were true believers. True believers in Jesus, turn from worshipping anything else to worshipping and serving the one true God. More than this, they live then with eager expectation for the return of Jesus Christ the Son. The one whom God raised from the dead, the one who alone can deliver those who believe in Him from the wrath to come.

### **Conclusion:**

The Gospel doesn’t just change our eternal address, it **transforms** our lives, our thinking, our speech, our lifestyles, our rhythms, our habits, our community...

What an amazing clear testimony these believers in Jesus had. The evidence of their changed lives testified loudly to the authenticity of their faith. People were speaking about the changes that had occurred in them.

When we truly make God the centre of our lives, everything begins to revolve around Him and find its proper perspective or orientation to Him. Is your faith crystal clear like that of the Thessalonians?

Is it evident to others that you have forsaken other “gods”? And that in their place you are passionately focussed on worshipping and serving God with your whole life?

This is the only reasonable response if you have grasped the wonder of who Jesus is and what He has done for you. May you, may we, live transformed lives that are radically focussed on Jesus, worshipping and serving Him for His glory with joy, while we wait for His glorious return!