

Semicontinuous
Exod. 33:12–23
Ps. 99

Complementary
Isa. 45:1–7
Ps. 96:1–9, (10–13)

1 Thess. 1:1–10
Matt. 22:15–22

A Spirit of Thanksgiving

Goal for the Session

Adults will reflect on Christian community as a space to live together in a spirit of thanksgiving.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Annette Weissenrieder

In verse 1 Paul expands a typical recurrent Greek letter formula: “Grace to you and peace.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:3, Paul refers to peace in the phrase “peace and security,” which is clearly a political slogan ascribed to the realm of the Roman Empire. Paul points to the coming of the day of the Lord as an event that will shatter the false peace and security of the Roman Empire. When Paul prefixes grace to it, the peace becomes uniquely Christian: “grace and peace” is the Pauline answer to “peace and security.”

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” David Burrell

The personal encounter with the Lord Jesus that irrevocably altered Paul’s life filled every other personal encounter with unimagined expectations: “we always give thanks to God for all of you” (v. 2). The fellowship that marks followers of Jesus comes laced with the unexpected, much as the advent of this Son of God into our world: “remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3). Theirs would be a service of free human beings, not of slaves, and so a service in faith, hope, and love.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Jill Y. Crainshaw

Congregations are to be bonded to one another in Christ by a spirit of thanksgiving for one another. What are the gifts of such a spirit? A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us as believers to be more intentional and thoughtful in all of the ways we communicate with one another. A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us toward greater communal intimacy. A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us to forgive and seek forgiveness, especially as each of us works to be understood and to understand.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Nathan Eddy

This is a powerful passage on the life of the church. God here is active, empowering, encouraging, and persistent in the lives of those who have turned to God. God in the Holy Spirit is especially active in this passage. Paul has seen not simply a cooperative “spirit,” but the Holy Spirit in their life: something beyond Paul’s doing or theirs. The “message of the gospel” comes not in word only, but in power in the Holy Spirit (v. 5). Empowered action is not incidental; it is central to the cooperative way God works in the world. The Holy Spirit builds people to take action, together.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

**1 Thessalonians
1:1–10**

YOU WILL NEED

- refreshments (optional)
- Bibles
- pens
- board or newsprint
- markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- map of Paul's second missionary journey or Bibles with maps
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for October 29, 2017

For Responding:

- option 2: writing paper; pens
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2; sturdy paper plate, fishing line, scissors, card stock, tape

Consider healthy snacks as refreshments rather than the standard sweet pastries. Fruits, whole grain breads, or cut-up vegetables with low-calorie dips are a few examples.

Focus on Your Teaching

Think about participants whom you expect will be coming to this session. Is church a space where they experience grace and peace, Christian community, and a spirit of thanksgiving? Or is church an obligation filled with committee meetings and too much conflict? Today's lesson offers an opportunity to experience and reflect on what a spirit of thanksgiving in community looks like.

Look at your class space. How can you make it a warmer, more hospitable space? One way is to provide refreshments. Perhaps a couple of participants would handle the details. Meditate on this sentence, repeating it several times as you breathe deeply:

Inspire me, O God, through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before participants arrive, prepare the room for the session, arranging the space to promote hospitality. Set out refreshments, if you are providing them. Make sure everything is ready for the first participant. As participants arrive, welcome them and invite them to get something to eat or drink and find a seat.

When all have arrived, ask the participants to sit quietly for a moment. Then lead them in this short meditation:

Think about when you have felt the most positive about a Christian community of which you were a part. Try to identify what made belonging to it a good experience. *(Pause)* Recall someone who was a mentor for you in that community. Think about that person and why she or he was a role model for you. *(Pause)* Recall time you spent with her or him. *(Pause)*

After a few moments, ask participants to transition to the group.

Ask:

- ✪ What made the community you remember special?
- ✪ What made the mentoring relationship so effective and important to you?

Write positive characteristics of the community and the mentor relationship on board or newsprint.

Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

Gracious, loving God, we are grateful for the love you have shown us through the life of your Son Jesus. Thank you for the communities where we experience this love. May our lives imitate Jesus and others who reflect your light. Amen.

Sustaining a life of self-sacrificial discipleship requires a supportive community in which grace and peace are constantly practiced. Where is this found in your congregation?

EXPLORING

Explain that the focus scripture today is from Paul's letter to the Christian community in Thessalonica, the Roman capital of Macedonia. It is thought to be Paul's earliest letter. Point to the map of Paul's second missionary journey or have participants locate this map in their Bibles. Find Thessalonica. Form two groups. Size is no problem. Have everyone turn to 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10. Tell participants to pretend they are two separate congregations and one church is receiving a letter from the other church. Have a volunteer from one group stand and read 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10, with feeling, on behalf of her or his group as though he or she wrote this text to the listeners. Then reverse this process by having someone from the other group stand and read the passage to the first group. Form groups of two to four people, arranging to have an even number of small groups. Ask half the groups to read the passage again to discover God's actions. The remaining groups will also read the passage but will be reading to discover the people's actions. After a few minutes, have one group with the "God's actions" assignment join with a group with the "people's actions" assignment. Have them report to each other.

When they have finished, distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10) Invite them to read the "What is . . .?" section silently. Then ask volunteers to look up the following greetings from some of Paul's other letters in the Bible and read them aloud: Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:2. Ask:

- ✧ What words are common in all these greetings?
- ✧ What is Paul saying about the uniqueness of Christian communities by always including these words in his greeting?

Remaining in small groups, have them read the "Where is . . .?" and the "So What?" sections on the resource sheet. Ask the whole group:

- ✧ What characteristics of a Christian community did you find in these excerpts?
- ✧ What are the three gifts of a spirit of thanksgiving?

As they decipher the characteristics and gifts, they will prepare for the Responding options.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities, depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Experiences of the Holy Spirit** Remind the group that in the text today Paul mentions many actions of the Holy Spirit. Some of those actions are: creating faith, building community, inspiring proclamation, and granting assurance about the life to come. The church also teaches that the Holy Spirit grants us gifts for ministry and guides us to be more like Christ. Form groups of three. Have each person in the group who is willing tell about a moment when God, the Holy Spirit, was actively present for them. Suggest that after each person speaks, the other two should offer a word of thanks for the Spirit's actions or a word of encouragement.

**EASY
PREP**

2. **Write a Letter** Paul gives thanks for those in Thessalonica who imitate him, his companions, and Christ. Provide paper and pens and invite the participants to write a letter or send an e-mail to a friend describing how your congregation imitates Christ. Encourage participants to think about all aspects of your congregation, such as worship, service opportunities, fellowship, or special ministries, such as providing a nursery during worship. Invite a few people to read their letters. Give thanks for your congregation.

3. **The Holy Spirit's Presence** Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Holy Spirit in Our Community) and pencils or pens. Ask participants to take ten minutes to answer the questions on their own. Then, come together and select one or two questions to discuss.

If, in the process of looking for examples of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the group decides that what they have discovered needs to be known more widely, have the group make a mobile. Two symbols are associated with the Holy Spirit: the descending dove and a flame. Use one or both as the parts of the mobile. Cut the symbols from card stock. Print on each symbol an example noted in the group discussion. Hang them with fishing line at varying lengths from a sturdy paper plate. You will need to balance the pieces so the plate stays parallel to the floor. Display it where the congregation will see it and low enough that people can read what is written on the symbols.

CLOSING

Gather as one group. To draw together the ideas from this session, invite single word or brief phrase answers to these questions:

- ✪ What word best describes our congregation?
- ✪ What new word would you use to describe our congregation?

Then have everyone sit or stand in a circle and hold hands. Invite each person to name one aspect of their faith community that is personally important. After each person speaks, the group responds:

Thanks be to God.

Conclude with this benediction from 1 Thessalonians 5:28: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for October 29, 2017, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

WHAT is important to know? — From “Exegetical Perspective,” Annette Weissenrieder

In verse 1 Paul expands a typical recurrent Greek letter formula: “Grace to you and peace.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:3, Paul refers to peace in the phrase “peace and security,” which is clearly a political slogan ascribed to the realm of the Roman Empire. Paul points to the coming of the day of the Lord as an event that will shatter the false peace and security of the Roman Empire. When Paul prefixes grace to it, the peace becomes uniquely Christian: “grace and peace” is the Pauline answer to “peace and security.”

WHERE is God in these words? — From “Theological Perspective,” David Burrell

The personal encounter with the Lord Jesus that irrevocably altered Paul’s life filled every other personal encounter with unimagined expectations: “we always give thanks to God for all of you” (v. 2). The fellowship that marks followers of Jesus comes laced with the unexpected, much as the advent of this Son of God into our world: “remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3). Theirs would be a service of free human beings, not of slaves, and so a service in faith, hope, and love.

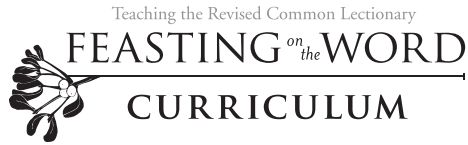
SO WHAT does this mean for our lives? — From “Pastoral Perspective,” Jill Y. Crainshaw

Congregations are to be bonded to one another in Christ by a spirit of thanksgiving for one another. What are the gifts of such a spirit? A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us as believers to be more intentional and thoughtful in all of the ways we communicate with one another. A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us toward greater communal intimacy. A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us to forgive and seek forgiveness, especially as each of us works to be understood and to understand.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do? — From “Homiletical Perspective,” Nathan Eddy

This is a powerful passage on the life of the church. God here is active, empowering, encouraging, and persistent in the lives of those who have turned to God. God in the Holy Spirit is especially active in this passage. Paul has seen not simply a cooperative “spirit,” but the Holy Spirit in their life: something beyond Paul’s doing or theirs. The “message of the gospel” comes not in word only, but in power in the Holy Spirit (v. 5). Empowered action is not incidental; it is central to the cooperative way God works in the world. The Holy Spirit builds people to take action, together.

October 22, 2017
A Spirit of Thanksgiving



Adult
Resource Sheet 2

The Holy Spirit in Our Community

Give specific examples of where you see the Holy Spirit alive and working in your church to empower, encourage, and persist in the lives of those who have turned to God.

Where do you feel the Holy Spirit most alive?

Where have you seen the Holy Spirit empower someone or a group?

Where has the Holy Spirit encouraged your congregation or a portion of it?

When do you think the Holy Spirit persisted?

When has the Holy Spirit built up people so they could take action together?

