



Today, we begin a new series in the book of 2 Thessalonians called Advent. Advent is a season of reflection and joy when we celebrate the "advent" or "arrival" of Jesus the Messiah. While Advent is a look back on the birth of Jesus, in many ways, 2 Thessalonians is a look ahead to His anticipated return. As you may recall, when Paul wrote this letter, many churches under his care were relatively new and filled with new believers. In several New Testament letters written to these new churches, the authors warn about false teachers – people coming in and twisting the gospel's message. In Thessalonica, false teachers tried to convince these new believers that Jesus had already returned. So, Paul wrote this letter to the church to bring clarity, and, in doing so, it would become one of the foremost books on the end times in the Bible.

Key Passage: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking back at your notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most from the sermon?
2. What kinds of family Christmas traditions did you grow up celebrating? How do you celebrate Advent with your family/children?
3. Many New Testament books have a repeated greeting centered around the phrase "grace and peace." Why is this greeting more than merely a greeting? What are its implications?

Paul begins his letter to the Thessalonians with the greetings of grace and peace. This was a greeting in the early church that adapted both Hellenistic and Jewish traditions, but we believe it was more than just a greeting. It was a doctrinal statement about life, so the order matters: GRACE, then PEACE. In an article entitled " Why Paul Never Wrote Peace and Grace, Pastor Casey Shutt writes, "The grace brings peace: peace with God, peace with other believers, and a broader peace throughout creation. The order is critical: grace *then* peace. Grace first. Peace follows. Other religions operate in the reverse: peace *then* grace. If I can gain peace with God (or the gods, or a supernatural force) through a set of practices, then I can secure his (or their) favor. We are saved by grace, which subsequently brings peace to our lives."

A lack of peace is one of the most significant glaring pieces of evidence of a person who is not a follower of Jesus. In other words, if a person has never experienced the grace of Jesus, the peace of God will not be present in their life. On the flip side, if a person has experienced the grace of Jesus, the peace of God will be present in their life (even though we all have to battle worry and anxiety).

4. God was clearly at work in the lives of the Thessalonian Christians. So much so that Paul points out three characteristics he observed among them. What was it about these believers that stood out to Paul? What does he say specifically about each of these observable characteristics?

Their FAITH was GROWING abundantly: The Greek word (hyperauxenei) here literally means to “grow exceedingly.” The root word “auxano” was used in the gospels to describe a baby's growth. So, their faith was growing like a baby grows rapidly and exceedingly.

Their LOVE for one another increased: When someone grows in their faith, the natural byproduct is an increase in love for others. The deeper you grow in your relationship with Christ, the more your love will increase for other people. If you're struggling to love someone, just make a conscious decision today to lean into the Lord and grow in your faith.

Their FAITH was STEADFAST amid persecutions and afflictions: Paul writes, “We are literally bragging on you to the other churches, that you guys and girls in Thessalonica are standing strong amid all the opposition.” Persecutions – the word here gives the thought of a chase, of being pursued with hateful acts; it's the idea of harassment and oppression. Afflictions – this word carries the idea of being crushed by intense pressure.

5. We all need encouragement, but we're not always very good at giving it. Have you ever followed Paul's example and encouraged someone as you observe God at work in them? Who comes to mind as someone you could encourage? How could you make this an intentional practice during Advent?
6. Our spiritual lives are dynamic, not static. We all experience seasons of growth and seasons where we experience some level of stagnation. In what season of your life did you grow the most spiritually? What attributed to that season of growth? How would you describe your current spiritual health?
7. How can love for others be a marker of one's spiritual vitality? Similarly, how can various trials reveal the condition of one's spiritual life? What practical steps can we take to stir our hearts toward loving others? How can God use trials to draw us back to Himself? How have you experienced this personally?

The deeper I grow in my relationship with Christ, the more my love will increase for other people. If you're struggling to love someone, just make a conscious decision today to lean into the Lord and grow in your faith. Conversely, when someone's faith is just “words,” a lack of love will reveal it. How many people have you known who professed “godliness,” but in all reality, it was just words because they were rude, selfish, and prideful? Our love is a revealer of where we're really at with people.

Persecutions, as stated earlier, is a word that gives the thought of a chase, of being pursued with hateful acts; it's the idea of harassment and oppression. Have you ever had anybody come at you like that? Is anybody experiencing persecution for being a Christian within your family or maybe your workplace?

Afflictions, as stated earlier, is a word that carries the idea of being crushed by intense pressure. Has anybody ever felt that before? Is anybody there now?

Think about the power of these believers' faith: Amid harassment, oppression, being chased with hateful acts, being crushed by intense pressure. They are standing tall in faith and steadfastness. They are persevering and not losing faith.

8. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on this week?