



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