



31 Days of Faith, Hope, and Love

“Great Start: 31 Days of Faith, Hope, And Love”

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Read This First

The new year is here. A fresh start. A canvas waiting for color. A garden ready for seeds. What will you plant in yours? The same old habits, worries, and fears? Or will you choose instead to grow your **faith, hope, and love**? Those are the main themes of the biblical book of First Thessalonians—the very three ingredients needed for a “Great Start.” Let’s explore it together.

You’re now starting a habit that changes everything else: meditating on Scripture daily. Just five minutes a day for the first 31 days of the year will establish a positive pattern that will bless your whole life!

Bite-Sized Bible

I know. The Bible can be intimidating. We look at its sheer size, its different translations and cultural nuances, and think, “This is too much for me.” So we’re tempted to leave the book closed, admiring the cover but fearing the journey inside.

But the Bible is not a fortress meant to intimidate; it’s a beautiful home built for you to enter. There are two keys to unlock the front door: An open heart, and daily habit.

That second key is very important. Think of it this way: You might resolve to eat a healthy breakfast each morning this month. But you’d never eat 31 servings of oatmeal on January First. No, you’d take it one small bowl at a time. Maybe with some blueberries and toasted almonds sprinkled on top (my own strong personal recommendation). That’s how we’ll do it. In

this book, we'll enjoy daily food for thought from one of the most accessible books of the Bible, First Thessalonians. One little serving a day.

It Starts with a Bang

The book of First Thessalonians is actually a letter, written to some of the very first Christians in Europe around AD 50. Thessalonica is still a bustling metropolis on a picturesque Greek bay today. When the apostle Paul stumbled into town nearly 2,000 years ago, there were zero Christians. Three weeks later, there was a growing group of enthusiastic believers.

They were immediately faced with violent opposition. A mob attacked. Paul himself was forced to flee. Yet the Thessalonian Christians survived and thrived, not by fighting back, but by loving people. In his first letter back to them, written just a few months later, Paul cheers them on and gives them important advice for keeping their forward momentum.

They took his words to heart: the Christian presence in Thessalonica has now lasted for nearly two thousand years. I'd call that a pretty great start!

Perfect Place to Begin

Here's why First Thessalonians is such a great study for the New Year:

- It's one of the **most encouraging** of the 66 books in the Bible. It's pure pep-talk from Coach Paul.
- It's one of the **shortest** books in the New Testament. Only 79 verses. You can easily read it in 30 minutes

(but we'll go through it slowly, to savor each delicious morsel).

- It's one of the **easiest** books in the New Testament to understand. It's simple, clear, and direct.
- It's one of the most **practical** books in the New Testament. It talks about joy, prayer, gratitude, endurance, relationships, and more.

All this makes it perfect if you're a new believer or returning to faith—and for veteran Christians too. We old-timers can really complicate the message sometimes. First Thessalonians simplifies it with a focus on Jesus and God's grace. Over the next 31 days, we'll walk through this powerful little book together, one day at a time. My goal is to make these rich spiritual truths feel accessible, like wisdom shared between friends over coffee.

Here's the tricky part: You can't grow everything. You just don't have the time. You need to decide you want to grow (faith, hope, love, berries) and what you need to radically degrow (doomscrolling, social comparison, grudges, guilt, worries, you name it). Let's swap five minutes of daily phone time and grow the good stuff together.

The Thessalonian believers got off to a great start. And they never stopped! How did they do it? Let's find out together!

January 1

Where Do You Live?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1

The busyness of December has faded, leaving you standing at the threshold of a quiet January. Look inside your mailbox. Most people don't get letters on January 1. But you did. The book of the Bible called "First Thessalonians" is actually a letter, written by Paul and his friends to the new Jesus-followers in Thessalonica. Like today, ancient Roman letters started with an address: Who is writing, who is it for, where do they live? Read this one: "Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Did you see it? Look closer. Paul adds some words to the usual formula. They live *physically* in Thessalonica. They live *spiritually* "in God." **If you have placed your faith in the Lord Jesus, that's where you live too.**

When you start your day, remember this address. No circumstance, no failure, can evict you from this sacred dwelling. Your life is hidden with Christ in God; that is your permanent, unshakable reality. Let grace and peace flow freely from this understanding today. You don't need a new resolution; you need a renewed realization: The Father chose you. The Son redeemed you. The Spirit sealed you. This is the foundation of a truly great start. It's a life lived "in God," the place where worry shrinks and faith expands. Start here. Stay here. And watch as ordinary days become testaments to an extraordinary God.

January 2

Grace and Peace

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1 again

Paul's first words to the Thessalonians after his address are the beautiful words he repeats so often in his letters, "Grace and peace to you."

Grace and peace. Two perfect post-Christmas gifts for a new month, a new year, a new start. You didn't earn them. You didn't purchase them. You didn't find them on a self-help shelf. God simply hands them to you, a perfect package tied with the Father's love.

Grace is another word for God's favor. Grace is not something you earn; it's something you receive through faith in Christ. Grace is an endless supply of "I forgive you." and "I support you." From grace flows peace. God's peace is the quiet lighthouse in a noisy, dark sea, a beacon that assures, **everything is going to be okay. God will work in all things for His glory.**

As 2026 begins, anchor your soul to this truth. You are not striving *for* God's favor; you are starting *from* His favor. As you step into this new month, leave the baggage of "not enough" at the door. You are in Christ, and He is enough. Then peace—the inner calm that only comes from knowing God loves you—is the result. This year isn't about trying harder; it's about trusting deeper. The Great Physician has prescribed a daily dose of "grace and peace" to calm your anxious heart and smooth your worried brow.

January 3

See The Year Through This Lens

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2

Today's verse shows Paul and his friends practicing what we often forget: deliberate appreciation for the people in our lives: "We always thank God for all of you," he writes. We are called to be conduits of thanks. When was the last time you truly stopped to thank God for the people He has placed in your world? In the busyness of our lives, we often rush past the treasures worthy of a thank-you. Today, intentionally pause the hustle. Look around and acknowledge the tangible expressions of God's grace walking around on two feet, the everyday angels disguised as ordinary people who make your journey a little lighter. And tell them!

Don't just reserve your gratitude for the mountaintop moments. Be thankful for the everyday, for the breath in your lungs, for the second chance you are living right now, for the people who bless you and whom you get to bless. Paul says, "We continually mention you in our prayers." Let your prayer life be less a wish list and more an acknowledgment list.

A grateful heart is a magnet for miracles because it sees the gifts of his grace everywhere. So begin this year by choosing to see the world not through the lens of what is missing, but through the abundance of what is already here. Anchor your soul in gratitude, and watch your January unfold with the quiet power of God's abiding love.

January 4

Your Motivation Makes the Difference

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3

January promises a clean slate. Yet we know how quickly the shine of a new year tarnishes. We trip over the same old roots, speak the same impatient words, think the same unholy thoughts, and wonder if a “great start” is even possible. The world keeps spinning, the bills keep coming, and the high hopes of January 1st can feel like a distant memory by January 4th.

We need more than just a new month.
We need a new source of power.

Paul points us toward this limitless resource. He writes about “your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” There it is. He compliments not just their work, labor, and endurance. What Paul is really encouraged by is their *motivation* for all that. It’s the fuel for the hard work and endurance you’ll need in the year ahead: **Faith, hope, and love.**

Most people (even most Christians) think of Christianity as moralism: “Be better people.” They think our message is, “work, labor, endure!” But that’s not the gospel. That’s an *effect* of the gospel. The gospel is faith, hope, and love: *Faith* in the God who gives you *hope* because he *loves* you so much that Jesus came to earth and sacrificed everything to save you. That produces, inspires, and motivates action.

Mother Teresa was once told by an honest journalist, “Pulling dying people out of the sewers?! I wouldn’t do that for all the money in the world!” She responded, “Neither would I!” Then she said, “I do this for Jesus. Who did this for me.” Her hard work was fueled by faith, hope, and love. Nothing else could motivate her to do what she did. Not for long, anyway.

If you start your January with a focus on hard work, labor, and endurance, you will burn out. If you start with faith, hope, and love, you will find the new year filled with opportunity and joy. **Your motivation changes everything.**

Think about it: If you are fueled by **faith** that Jesus loves you unconditionally, **hope** that God is always working, and **love** for God and His children, your actions and attitudes will inevitably change. It’s a direct consequence of what you’re cultivating in your mind. Thoughts produce attitudes, attitudes produce actions, actions produce habits, and habits lead to destinies.

Let your new year be defined by a thoughtful reordering of what you think about. Let’s make it about faith, hope, and love.

January 5

Before You Resolve, Relax

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4

The new year arrives like a blank page in a fresh notebook, clean and full of potential. What do you see when you look at that blank page? Maybe you see a list of resolutions or hopes for a healthier life. But before you pick up your pen to track your progress, pause and listen. Can you hear it?

God is saying He loves you. The apostle Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, describes a truly great start, one rooted not in our effort, but in God's invitation. He says, "For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you." Today, anchor your hearts to this truth: you are deeply, wonderfully loved by God.

God loves you.

Your heavenly Father knows you by name.

He chose you.

He singled you out with divine intention.

Let this truth be the foundation of your January. Before you think of your resolutions or goals – and whether you're achieving them – remember this primary, beautiful fact: you are God's chosen treasure.

We often stumble into a new year burdened by the past, our vision clouded by failures and missteps.

We look at the blank page of January and wonder if we can *finally* get it right this time.

But the joy of 1 Thessalonians 1:4 is that God's embrace isn't based on your performance; it's based purely on His affection. He chose you. That is a settled matter.

You don't have to earn His approval or prove your worthiness today, tomorrow, or any day this month. You are loved, chosen, cherished—*already*. This isn't a prize you work for; it's a gift you receive.

So start your year here, in the quiet assurance of His affection. When the pressures of life press in, when you feel inadequate or lost, return to this foundational truth. This security isn't based on your feelings, but on God's unwavering character. He sees you not for who you *might* be, but for who you *are* in Christ: Beloved and chosen.

Rest in that.

Breathe it in.

This is how you have a truly great start:

By accepting the love that has already accepted you.

January 6

Great Starts in Bad Times

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

A great start isn't about everything going right. The believers in Thessalonica didn't have the luxury of a quiet new year. They were swimming upstream in a flood of trouble.

The Book of Acts tells us Paul had barely three weeks with them before a mob of jealous opponents, described as “troublemakers from the marketplace,” formed a mob and started a riot. The charges were political dynamite: these Christians were “defying the decrees of Caesar” and “advocating another king, Jesus”(Acts 17:7). This was an accusation of treason, a capital offense in the Roman world. Their host, Jason, was dragged before the city authorities. Paul was forced to flee by night.

This young flock was left alone almost immediately, facing life-threatening hostility from their own neighbors who saw their loyalty to Jesus as a threat to the Empire's promised “peace and safety.”

Yet when Paul looked at them, he didn't see people crushed by circumstance, but people who had “welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” (verse 1:6) In the midst of the suffering, they focused on the joyful message.

When I travel by train in Switzerland, the country of my parents, I always ask the conductor which side of the train is best for the view. That's because I've learned that in the Alps, one side of the line is typically gorgeous, with jaw-dropping vistas of glacial lakes and jagged peaks, while on the other side, the windows stare at the side of a steep cliff.

That's a lot like life. What window are you looking through? You can choose to glare at the gloom or gaze at the glory. **The secret to a great start to your year isn't a change of scenery; it's a redirection of your gaze.**

The joy that others saw in the Thessalonian believers turned their test into a testimony. Their faith was contagious. Paul notes that they became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (v. 7). They weren't perfect—nobody is on this side of glory—but their consistent faith was real and visible and inspiring.

As you start your January, let that be your goal: To be a living, breathing billboard of God's grace. Let your quiet trust in the middle of a loud, anxious world point others toward the One who calms the storm. Your life, though imperfect, can be a beacon. Faith, forged in the fires of real life, is incredibly attractive to a world starved for hope.

Let your life declare that **God is good, even when the news isn't.**

January 7

It Gets Results

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1

In today's verse, Paul points out that his brief visit to Thessalonica was "not without results." That is putting it mildly.

In fact, his visit turned the city upside-down. In just three weeks, "some of the Jews joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women." (Acts 17:4). Meanwhile, others formed a mob and spread false rumors that the Christians were plotting a rebellion. But the Thessalonian believers hung in there. Despite initial opposition, there has been a continuous Christian community in Thessalonica right up until today!

The biggest threat came in 306 AD, when the tetrarch Galerius, who was part of a brutal and bloody Roman campaign to wipe out the Christian faith, built a massive rotunda in Thessalonica in his own honor. He meant it for his mortuary temple, a lavish tomb for Romans to worship his divine memory. Within just a few years, Christianity had been legalized, and Galerius' monument was remodeled ...into a church! It is one of the oldest church buildings still standing in the world today. From that church, thousands of Christian workers were sent around the world. Thessalonica's strategic location as a major port then made it a hub for generations of Christian pastors.

Yes, I'd say Paul's visit definitely got results. Results that lasted.

I love to read business books about how to succeed, especially classics like *Built to Last* or *Good to Great*. But there's one problem all these books have: They only look at what's successful right now, right here, in our time, in our culture. And those successes often do not last. Of the eleven companies singled out as "great" in *Good to Great*, most have underperformed, gone bankrupt, or are non-existent today.

By contrast, think about these early Christians. Their success has lasted for two thousand years. Thanks to their influence, empowered by the Holy Spirit, today we have not only churches, but also public education, nursing care, orphanages, hospitals, laws against infanticide and slavery, and more, all of which emerged from the values of Christianity. These Christians changed the moral culture of Roman society, and they did it past every imaginable roadblock. And our faith not only changes culture; it changes people. It brings peace, joy, and healing.

Of course, Jesus Christ is our Lord whether or not our faith "gets results." Certainly we should never imagine Christianity as a transactional ("I give God my worship and he answers my prayers the way I want Him to"). But it is also true that the faithful application of the gospel of Jesus "is not without results." It changed the world. This year, be part of a movement still going strong for over two millennia!

January 8

The Audience of One

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:2-6

Today's Key Verses: "...we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God..." (v. 4)

The world has plenty of critics and more than enough applause. Your real audience is an audience of One. Your true mission in life is from Him. Paul knew he was "approved by God" and "entrusted with the gospel." Same goes for you. You have been approved by God for a mission: **To be an agent of hope in an increasingly hopeless world.** God's approval and trust is what motivated Paul to speak "not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts."

The applause you're chasing shouldn't be the noisy clapping of a transient crowd, but the quiet, eternal affirmation of the Almighty. When you remember that he lavishes grace on you, gives you a mission, and empowers you, the fear of human rejection shrinks. Only the King's opinion matters.

As you step into January, remember this high calling. You're not just starting a new month; you're on a sacred assignment. God has put His message of hope in your hands. Let your life be a shout-out to His goodness. Start this new year by trusting the One who entrusted you with the greatest news ever. You have been approved and entrusted with good news, so go make some heavenly noise.

January 9

Be There and Be Real

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

Paul was no egotist. He writes that he could have asserted his authority when he taught the Thessalonians. Instead, he says, he was as guileless as a small child and as tender as a nursing mother. (verse 7) He did not “lord it over” the people in this church. When you see heavy authoritarianism in a church leader, whether online or local, run the other direction, and fast. If someone shouts bossy instructions like the loud and overbearing Wizard of Oz, demanding obedience, you can be sure they are not speaking for Jesus.

“Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well,” Paul writes. He didn’t just *teach* them; he was *with* them. He pulled up a chair, poured a cup of coffee, and stayed awhile. He wasn’t just about faith as a concept, but faith as a relationship—a hands-on, day-to-day, living-it-out kind of faith. He was real. They saw him for who he was.

Think about the people who truly made a difference in your journey. Was it the person who had all the answers, or the person who sat with you in the hard questions? Paul’s approach reminds us that the gospel is best delivered not just with words, but with *life*. Because it’s not an invitation to a system of belief; it’s an invitation into a relationship.

Paul says he was “like a nursing mother” (v. 7) and “like a father with children.” (v. 11) Notice the verbs Paul uses to describe his style: gentle, affectionate, encouraging, comforting, urging. These are words of comfort and not cruelty. His ministry was not marked by lording it over people, but by living with people.

Paul wasn’t just dropping off a theological instruction manual and hoping for the best. No, he was down in the dirt with them, knees bent, sleeves rolled up, investing his time like a good parent teaching a child their ABCs or how to ride a bike: Patiently and lovingly guiding. That’s how you can invest in the lives of others, too.

In our socially distanced world, be *with* people. In real life. Don’t just drop truth bombs on them from afar. Be their friend. Their loving guide.

As you begin this new year, make a new resolution for **connection**. Share your life, not just your opinions or your advice.

When we open our homes, our schedules, and our hearts, we create space for God’s love to take root. We get to be the hands and feet of Jesus, offering encouragement and a tangible touch of grace. It’s a simple, profound principle: **The Christian way of life is living loved, and then living lovingly.**

January 10

Warm Words or Divine Declaration?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13

When Paul taught them, the Thessalonians didn't just hear a motivational speech; they recognized the ring of truth. They chose to accept the gospel not as a manmade story, but as truth from God Himself. "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," Paul writes.

This act of faith—this decision to classify God's message not as mere literature but as *life itself*—opened the floodgates. The Word, once received, went to work, actively transforming, shaping, and invigorating their lives. It wasn't passive, dry doctrine; it was an active ingredient.

It's possible to treat the gospel as merely a gentle, comforting story, a spiritual self-help manual we pick up when the going gets tough. We relegate it to the shelf of "nice ideas" or "moral guidelines."

Yet, what if we altered our perspective entirely? What if we understood the gospel not as good advice from a kind neighbor, but as a divine declaration from the King of the universe?

This shift changes everything.

Because then, every promise isn't just wishful thinking; it's a signed covenant from the Almighty. The peace

offered isn't a temporary cease-fire with anxiety; it is the deep, abiding calm that comes from knowing the Creator of the cosmos will never stop loving you.

When understood as the word of God, the gospel becomes an anchor in the storm, not a life vest tossed into the waves.

This year, let the gospel be the north star for your journey, not just a friendly flashlight. Treat it with the awe and reverence due a message penned by God's own hand. **Let its authority reorder your priorities, its promises silence your fears, and its grace fill every nook and cranny of your heart.**

That will turn your "Great Start" in January into an enduring reality throughout the year.

January 11

Brothers and Sisters in Suffering

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

This is one of those Bible passages where first-century intent can be totally misunderstood from our 21st-century distance. To modern eyes, it looks like Paul is saying terrible, anti-Semitic things, disparaging the Jewish people. But that's taking these verses completely out of their original context. After all, Paul himself was Jewish, as were most of the Christians in the world at that point in history.

What Paul is trying to establish is a sense of *brotherhood* between the Gentile Thessalonian Christians and the Jewish Christians: "For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews." (v. 2:14)

Ready for a quick history blast?

Paul's Thessalonian readers were *Macedonians*. The Macedonians were the Greek-speaking nation of Alexander the Great. Alexander was determined to "Hellenize" the entire world; that is, to bring the Greek language and culture everywhere. His successors eventually tried to wipe out the Jewish religion.

It all reached a horrible crescendo in 168 BC, when the Macedonian king, Antiochus Epiphanes of the Seleucid Dynasty, entered the Jerusalem Temple,

declared himself to be God on earth, and sacrificed a pig on the holy altar. He followed up by requiring every Jew to bring their Scriptures for burning. He wanted to eradicate the Jews by eradicating Judaism. Finally, the Judeans overthrew him during the bloody Maccabean War. So there was long-standing, bitter hatred between *Macedonians* and *Judeans*.

In these verses, Paul is saying that, incredibly, the Macedonian Jesus-followers and the Jewish Jesus-followers are now brothers and sisters! **Jesus has brought these two groups, once bitter enemies, together.** What did they have in common? For one thing, they both experienced oppression from their very own people. Macedonian Christians were being oppressed by Macedonian rulers. Jerusalem Christians were oppressed by the Judean rulers. It's as if he is saying, "Your suffering is evidence you're family!" Their shared experience overrode their divisive history.

Jesus brings people together. Even former enemies. We must recognize that every child of God is our brother or sister.

Today, Christians from countries like Somalia, Nigeria, Sudan, Iran, and more are suffering oppression. Pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ there. Ask God to protect and strengthen them, and to open your heart about ways that you may be able to help them.

No matter the language we speak, the country we are from, or the color of our skin, family always sticks together.

January 12

Truly Rewarding

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

Today's Key Verses: “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

When our Savior returns, and we stand before Him, hearts thrumming with joy and awe, in that magnificent moment, what will truly matter?

Not the titles we held, the wealth we amassed, or the accolades we earned. No, our true glory, our eternal crown, will be the lives we touched.

Paul didn't look to worldly treasures for his reward; he looked to the faces of the Thessalonians, reborn and radiant in Christ. He declares that they are his “glory and joy.” What a powerful statement! They were his delight.

Your eternal purpose and reward aren't found in your performance, but in the people you love. When all is said and done, when the final score is tallied, the only trophies that matter to you will be the redeemed lives beside you.

You don't need a grand strategy or an intricate plan. You simply need a heart tuned to the value of a single soul. Every encouraging word you offer, every patient smile you share, every prayer whispered for a friend—

these are not small things. These are seeds, watered by the Holy Spirit.

The apostle's heart practically bursts with anticipation for that moment. He sees his work not as a job in a factory, but as the planting of an orchard whose fruit would be presented to the Master Himself.

You have that same opportunity today. Don't let the fog of the mundane obscure this incredible truth: the most important part of your life is the impact you have on someone else's journey toward the eternal goal.

Walk into this new year full of purpose and hope. Your life has profound meaning, a meaning that transcends the daily grind and stretches into eternity. Look around your kitchen table, your workplace, your neighborhood. Invest in the people you see with love, patience, and grace.

In doing so, you are not merely having a great start to your year; you are investing in eternal treasures that will shine brightest when you finally see Jesus face to face. That is where true glory lies.

January 13

Dual Destiny

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Pollsters say that by the end of next week, most Americans will have given up on their New Year's resolutions. There's even a name for January 19th: "Global Giving-Up Day."

It's easy to get unsettled when the trials come rolling in. The new year starts, full of resolutions and fresh hope, and then *bam*, a setback, a piece of bad news, a failure, a habit that won't change, a worry that won't budge.

Paul tells the Thessalonians the truth about trials: "You know quite well that we are destined for them." (v. 3) A cheerful thought for January, right? But it's an honest one.

Hardship isn't an "if," it's a "when." The Christian life isn't a promise of smooth sailing; it's a promise of an anchor that holds firm when the waves get choppy. The goal isn't to avoid the waves, but to keep our faith unshaken *in* the waves. You have a dual destiny: troubles now, but triumphs later. **The struggles are temporary; God's love isn't.**

Paul and his companions were so concerned about encouraging the young church in Thessalonica, facing a world that wasn't exactly rolling out the welcome mat for Jesus-followers, that they "could stand it no longer."

They wanted to encourage them against quitting. Their solution? Send Timothy, a trusted friend, to check in, simply to “strengthen and encourage you in your faith.” He was not a cold inspector; he was a warm cheerleader.

That’s a reminder that God often uses *people* to deliver His comfort. When life throws its storms your way, He provides friends who often show up just when you need them most. And it’s also a reminder that *you* can be that cheerleader for someone else. Commit, in this new year, to becoming part of a vibrant faith community where you get encouraged, and you get to encourage.

There’s a reason sports teams almost always play better at their local arenas instead of on the road. The support of the home crowd really makes a tangible difference. We all need cheerleaders. Your church can be the place you feel “home crowd energy” that keeps you going!

So don’t quit. And cheer someone else on today.

January 14

Postcard of Joy

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

Today's Key Verse: "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?" (1 Thessalonians 3:9)

Isn't it funny how a simple card or text can change your day? A few lines from a friend, an update on their life, a shared memory—and suddenly the gray skies of January feel a little brighter.

That's what Paul is describing here, in the report from Timothy about the Thessalonians. He's writing from a place of "distress and hardship" (the original Greek makes it sound even tougher, like he was literally in a bind) when Timothy shows up with news. Good news. The best kind of news, actually. The Thessalonian believers were doing great. They were holding onto their faith and love, even remembering Paul fondly.

When was the last time a piece of news lifted your spirit right out of the mud? That's God's grace at work, a little sunshine breaking through the clouds, reminding us that **even in tough times, God is still at work.**

This passage is a peek into the power of human connection. Paul's joy isn't some minor happiness; it's a deep, soul-stirring gladness that makes him wonder, "How can we thank God enough?" It was so real that he felt as if his life was revived: "For we now live, if you stand firm in the Lord."

What a powerful picture of Christian community! Our faith is not a solo sport; it's a team effort. Your decision to reach out in love through a message or a visit might just be the very thing that helps your brother or sister make it through their own January struggle.

So here's the challenge for today: Be a Timothy.

Your words of encouragement, your simple act of kindness, your good news—these can be the very things that bring joy to someone walking through a season of distress and hardship. Don't underestimate the power of a phone call, a heartfelt email, or a genuine compliment.

A single act of grace can go a long way in warming up a cold January morning.

January 15

Love Overflowing

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

When Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, he didn't ask for their troubles to vanish forever or their bank accounts to overflow. He prays for an overflow of a different kind. "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else" (v 12). He doesn't pray for a trickle or even a steady stream. He prays for a *flood*, a deluge of the good stuff, the kind that spills over the boundaries of your own life and soaks everyone nearby, because it flows from the limitless reservoir of a God who loved you first.

This January, don't just focus on the scales or the budget. Focus on the overflow. Ask the Lord to fill your heart with His affection until you have no choice but to slosh it onto your grumpy neighbor, your busy coworker, and the stranger in the checkout line.

Why pray for the Thessalonians to be "filled with love"? The goal is holiness. This isn't a do-it-yourself religiosity achieved through sheer willpower or gritted teeth. The holiness Paul describes is a gift of grace, rooted in love. God saves you, strengthens you, and lavishes his love on you. Then you learn to live in grace as He crafts the character of Christ within you.

Trust Him today. Trust that He is creating an overflow of love, and preparing you, heart and soul, for the day you see Him face to face.

January 16

Who Do You Live For?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

There's a scene in the movie "Finding Nemo" where Crush, the sea turtle with a California surfer accent, encourages his little son as he rides the East Australian Current for the very first time. "Dude, you SO TOTALLY ROCK," Crush shouts with exuberant joy. His son already knows he's well-loved. But he loves to do things that delight his dad.

That's the picture Paul is painting in today's verses. "Live in order to please God," he says. Paul has already made clear that God loves you unconditionally. This is about living in a way that further delights your Father.

When you visit someone who is sick or in prison, when you bless instead of curse, when you feed someone in need, I imagine your father rejoicing over you with the shout, "Dude, you SO TOTALLY ROCK!" He is *delighted* when we ride the wave of grace.

The Christian life isn't just about getting *eternal life one day*; it's about actively pursuing a *vibrant life today*, a life that brings a smile to the face of our Creator.

We seek approval in so many places, don't we? From our bosses, our neighbors, even strangers on the internet. It's an exhausting chase. But the apostle Paul again points us toward an audience of just One. Paul says, in essence, "You're already doing this. Keep going in that direction!"

As you navigate this young January, maybe your resolution should be less about what you *stop* doing and more about *who* you're living for.

That isn't a temporary resolution.

It's a permanent reorientation.

When you wake up, before your feet even hit the floor, whisper a simple prayer: "Lord, help me **delight in You**, and also, help me **delight You** today."

That prayer puts the demanding world back in its proper place and reminds us that we have the best dad ever. God.

January 17

The Secret to Success

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6

Did you know that science affirms what Scripture has spoken for centuries? **The ability to delay immediate gratification for future reward** is one of the most powerful predictors of lifelong success and happiness.

Groundbreaking academic research, like the famous “marshmallow test,” followed children for decades and found that those who could resist a marshmallow treat for a double portion later became adults with higher academic scores, better health outcomes, and more stable relationships.

This capacity for self-control, for choosing long-term blessing over short-term bursts of pleasure, isn’t about rigid and joyless self-denial; it is about steering your life with intention, navigating conflicts between desires and goals, and finding profound satisfaction in a life well-lived.

This pursuit of a fulfilling, well-ordered life is exactly what the Apostle Paul points toward when he writes, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4).

To be “sanctified” does not mean being dreary and dull; sanctification is the process of becoming the best version of you—the one God designed. He is the

Master Architect who knows that His boundaries are the very things that provide the safety and structure needed for a life of purpose and flourishing. To embrace His will is to align your heart with the Designer's intent.

You have been entrusted with a unique treasure: your body. It is a work of divine art. The challenge from Scripture is to learn how to take care of it in an honorable way.

This control isn't a white-knuckle suppression of your humanity, but a graceful stewardship, recognizing that you have something sacred.

Deciding this January to treat your body with honor is a powerful step toward a life of profound respect—for yourself, and for the One who created you.

January 18

Take the High Road

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8

God wants you to be holy. That word, “holy,” can sound intimidating, like something reserved for saints in stained-glass windows. But it simply means to be set apart, different from the crowd, to live a life that reflects God’s heart, not the world’s passions. Many people, Paul says, chase after every urge, driven by a relentless hunger for *more*. But you? You’ve been given a new identity. Choose the honorable life that goes along with it. Living this way—embracing righteousness and self-respect— isn’t just some stuffy, rulebook requirement. It’s a way of honoring the people around you. Paul warns that no one should “wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.” Sexual integrity isn’t just about what you don’t do; it’s about how you value others.

When you choose the high road of holiness, you are listening to the very voice of God. He isn’t calling you to a life of dull denial, but to a life filled with His Spirit and His purpose. **Think of it as an invitation to a deeper, more meaningful existence, one that goes against the frantic current of a confused world.** You weren’t called to be just like everyone else; you were called to be a light, a beacon of hope and grace in a dimming world. Let this January be a starting point. Choose the path of purity, embrace the gift of self-control, and allow God to shape you into the honorable person he created you to be. He has already given you His Holy Spirit to help you do just that!

January 19

Start with Love

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

The best New Year's resolution isn't found in a gym membership or a budget spreadsheet, but in the powerful call of the Apostle Paul: "You yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God's family...Yet we urge you to do so more and more." (v. 9-10)

Paul doesn't command the Thessalonians to learn how to love; he reminds them that they already know how. Love isn't a complex idea you need a seminary degree to decipher; it is the simple, foundational operating system for living the Jesus Way: **be loved and be loving**. Receive God's love in Christ, then overflow with that love to others.

How do you make the next eleven months truly count? By deciding daily to run the race with love as your pace car. The world is weary and worn. It needs the quiet consistency of believers who have taken their God-given instruction seriously. Start right where you are: in your home, at your desk, in the grocery store aisle. You don't need a grand strategy; you just need a willing heart. Let your love be the defining characteristic of your year. As you extend grace, offer patience, and act generously, you aren't merely being nice; you are participating in the divine nature of Jesus himself, filling up the world with the very thing it needs most: Him.

January 20

Mind Your Own Business

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

“Make it your ambition to...”

How would you finish that sentence? Our culture demands that we build a platform, gather a crowd, and ensure our voice rises above the din. Listen instead to a gentle, counter-cultural whisper. Let's take a closer look at verses 11-12...

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.”

Strive for peace and a life free from conflict, not fanaticism or busyness. This quiet life might smell of sawdust and fresh bread; it may sound like the clack of a keyboard or the turning of a wrench; it could look like pushing a child on a swing or changing a diaper. It's a life characterized by steady faithfulness rather than frantic striving.

“Mind your own business.”

That's a call to boundary and focus. Concentrate on your own responsibilities. Don't get too distracted by the antics of celebrities or politicians. Be industrious and honest. When we “work with our hands”—whether typing a report, folding laundry, or drawing up blueprints—we participate in a divine rhythm. This honest labor is our liturgy.

“So that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders.”

This diligent lifestyle serves as a powerful testimony to the world. There is a magnetic integrity to the person who isn't chasing fame or drama, but is simply available and reliable.

There's another reason Paul tells the Thessalonians to mind their own business and work with their hands. Apparently, some of them thought that Jesus had already returned, and they had stopped meeting their responsibilities. Later, in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-11, Paul speaks even more specifically against this.

When the great 16th-century church leader Martin Luther was asked what he would do if the world were to end tomorrow, he answered, **“I would plant a tree today.”**

This is Paul's point. He is telling the Thessalonians not to get caught up in religious rumors and fads, but to focus on what God has given them to do each day. The reputation we have in the eyes of those outside the faith is important. Are we good for the workplace? For the neighborhood? Would they miss us if we left?

This January, choose the quiet path. Find your work, mind your sphere, and let your calm, diligent life honor your Father before the watching world.

January 21

See You Later

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

When our three kids were very young, we drove up to Santa Rosa to visit their second cousins. It was the first time in their lives that they had ever met other Schlaepfers!

They had a 10 out of 10 day on the kid fun scale, chasing each other, chasing the backyard chickens, climbing front yard trees. When we had to pack up, there was much protest. But we reminded them of two truths:

We were going home.

And we can always see their cousins again.

It was goodbye.

But not goodbye forever.

We were never meant for forever goodbyes. When a brother or sister in Christ passes, we feel the sting: The sting of separation, the ache of an empty chair, the silence where a laugh used to be.

But remember two truths.

They are going home.

And we will see them again.

It is not goodbye forever.

When Jesus returns, there will be a great reunion. We will meet the Lord, meet those who have gone before us, and “we will be with the Lord forever.” Goodbyes

will turn into hellos. Forever. No more hospitals, no more tears, no more empty chairs.

That doesn't mean we won't grieve. But as Max Lucado writes, "God transforms our hopeless grief into hope-filled grief."

Our loved ones have not ceased to *be*; they have simply ceased to be *here*. The separation is temporary, a mere blink of an eye in the grand scheme of eternity. The period at the end of their earthly sentence is just a comma in the never-ending book of their existence.

This hope is anchored not in wishful thinking, but in an empty tomb. It all hinges on a single, universe-altering fact: "We believe that Jesus died and rose again." If death could not hold the Son of God, it certainly cannot hold His children.

So comfort each other with these words. In Christ, your "good-bye" is really "see you later."

January 22

Live the Illuminated Life

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

The Lord is coming. So what are you supposed to do with that tantalizing promise?

Paul speaks to this with wisdom. “About times and dates we do not need to write to you,” he says. No need to guess or debate about the *timing*. Just live in the light of the *promise*: Jesus is returning. He will heal the world.

Max Lucado asks, “Have you ever wondered what that ‘shout’ will be when the Lord returns (see 4:16)? It will be the word that closes one age and opens a new one... Perhaps the King of kings will raise his pierced hand and proclaim, ‘No more.’ No more loneliness. No more tears. No more death. No more sadness. No more crying. No more pain.”¹

We can encourage one another with the promise of this certain outcome: Jesus will one day make all things right and all things new. This expectation reframes every decision and recolors every disappointment. When we feed the hungry, care for the needy, and help the grieving, we are giving people a taste of heaven, where Jesus will eliminate all hunger, need, and grief.

It was specifically this hope that kept leaders like Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. going through all their

1. Max Lucado, *Life Lessons from First and Second Thessalonians*, p. 62 (New York: HarperChristian, 2028)

challenges. It's what he referred to in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, when he quoted the Book of Isaiah: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together." As he put it, the gospel tells us "the long arc of history" is bending inexorably toward love and justice.

"So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep," Paul writes. The world often lives in a sleepy fog. But you are invited to live in the sunlight of God's promises. "You are all children of the light and children of the day," Paul reminds us, so stay "awake and sober." Those words paint a picture of deliberate, conscious living. Sobriety isn't just about what you avoid; it's about what you embrace: clarity of purpose and intentionality in your steps. Live an illuminated life.

What keeps you ready while you wait? "Put on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." (v. 8) This is essential armor for the soul.

Faith guards your heart against the arrows of doubt. **Love** shields you from the cynicism of a weary world. And the helmet? It protects your mind, reminding you always that **your ultimate salvation is secure.**

So step into the new year with courage. Whether the hour is near or far, you are appointed for salvation, not wrath. That means **you are destined for a great finish to match your great start.**

January 23

Be Respectful

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Fresh years are fresh starts, chances to get back to habits that build up instead of tear down. Why not start by building up those who built you?

In today's verses, Paul reminds us to "respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work."

Think of the people who helped you find your footing in faith, who pointed you toward Jesus when the fog of life settled in. The pastors, the teachers, the friends who stayed faithful, prayed often, and offered a steady hand.

Speaking on behalf of pastors everywhere, I know we are far from perfect! But it can be tough. When I open my emails each morning, no one is ever contacting me to say, "Just wanted you to know that everything is fine, René!" Generally speaking, they're upset. Life has smacked them hard, right between the eyes. They are discouraged. Doubting. Grieving. Needy. Furious. (Sometimes at me!) I get it. It's my job. I am glad to hear from the distressed sheep so I can try to help!

But it sure feels good when someone just says, "I appreciate you." And if I feel that way, I can only imagine what faithful pastors in out-of-the-way towns or tiny congregations must feel.

Studies show that more pastors than ever before are considering leaving the ministry, mostly due to internal pressures at their churches related to politics. So “esteem them very highly in love.” They wrestle with difficult questions. It requires a special kind of grace. The next time you see one of the faithful shepherds in your life, remember the weight they carry. Your appreciation might just be the spiritual boost they need to keep going.

I’m not just talking about your pastors at your church. What about those who serve in other ministries around town? We don’t have to agree on everything, but we can lovingly appreciate other pastors, fostering peace among the family of God.

If you have heard good things about another church in your community, make a point of telling others about it. Bless that church with your words. You might even write a note to their pastor and thank them for their ministry. Pray for them.

Let’s choose goodness and gentleness in our relationships with our broader church family, especially those in leadership. When we respect the shepherds, we reflect our respect for the Great Shepherd Himself. We make their service a joy. What better way to start a new year than with a heart full of gratitude and a spirit committed to unity?

January 24

Live in Peace

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:13-14

I can still remember when the line, “live in peace with each other” (verse 13) sounded easy; a dreamy, languid, Santa Cruz hippy lifestyle, smiling benignly and handing out daisies.

Not anymore. Now to live in peace sounds like a job for a super-genius. It means navigating all the triggers and traumas, the grievances and disgruntlements, the politics and pet peeves all around you, with the careful skill of a ballet dancer in a minefield.

Switching metaphors to something less explosive, it requires you to be something of a spiritual gardener, tending to a variety of human hearts.

“Warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” (verse 14)

Some souls, Paul notes, are “idle and disruptive.” They are like dandelions in the lawn and need a firm, clear word.

Others are “disheartened,” their spirits sagging like a winter vine. They need the gentle trellis of encouragement, an arm around the shoulder.

Then there are the “weak,” those plants needing extra attention to ensure they are getting enough water and sunlight.

We are called to be patient with all the plants in the garden, to meet each person not at the speed of our expectation, but at the pace of His grace.

Grace is the generous patience we extend to others because of the extravagant patience God has extended to us.

We are all imperfect people in a broken world, yet we bear the light of a perfect Savior. So let January be a month of grace. Extend it freely to the disruptive, the disheartened, and the weak.

In every interaction, ask yourself: How would the patient Christ respond?

And remember: A great start to a new year isn't found in flawless execution, but in the simple, profound act of clothing ourselves daily in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and, above all, patience.

January 25

Break the Cycle

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:15-28.

Let's start our final week by reading this whole passage. Then we'll examine the verses more closely each day.

Today's Key Verse: "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else" (v. 5:15).

This last section of First Thessalonians contains one quick tip after another. It's like the Apostle Paul's lightning round. So we'll take each brief word of wisdom in turn this week.

Here's your assignment today: Be a cycle breaker.

The world needs fewer score-keepers and more grace-givers. Your mission is to intentionally be kind to that difficult coworker, forgive that thoughtless relative, or offer a genuine smile to the surly store clerk. You can't control their reaction, but you can control your response. Don't let someone else's bad day ruin your divine mission.

Start this year right by leaving the ledger of wrongs in the past and choosing the unending abundance of God's grace.

Maybe it feels impossible. You got a raw deal. Someone stole what was rightfully yours. Someone took credit for your work. Someone said a harsh word. The response feels justified, doesn't it? A quick jab back, an

“eye for an eye” to even the score. The world runs on this economy of grievance.

But pause for a moment.

Look at the cross.

Did Jesus pay back wrong for wrong?

No. He absorbed the debt. He broke the cycle.

First Thessalonians 5:15 isn't just nice advice; it's a divine blueprint for a different kind of living.

**You can be a prisoner of yesterday's offenses,
or a pioneer of tomorrow's grace.**

When you choose to “always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else,” you are investing in the kingdom, not the chaos.

Retaliation breeds more retaliation; kindness, however, is the contagious currency of heaven. Your kindness may be someone's first taste of grace.

January 26

The Deeper Reality

Today's Key Verse: "Rejoice always." (v. 5:16)

That's it. Just two words. "Rejoice always."

Maybe the holiday cheer has faded and the New Year's resolutions are showing cracks. In this January chill, Paul doesn't ask you to drum up a superficial smile and pretend away your troubles. He invites you into a deeper reality, a stubborn, profound joy that isn't dependent on a sunny forecast. This joy is a quiet acknowledgment that God is still on the job, that His love for you is not circumstantial, but covenantal. It's the deep-seated certainty that no matter the circumstances, He remains unchanged.

We easily confuse happiness with joy; happiness is a response to favorable events, but joy is a posture of the soul rooted in God's unwavering character. Joy is a choice, a muscle we exercise. The command to "rejoice always" is a divine invitation to trade your anxieties for awe, to look past the immediate gloom and focus on the light of Christ.

Joy starts with gratitude. When you wake up, before the worries flood in, thank Him for another day. When the day ends, thank Him for His sustaining grace. Persistent gratitude is the soil where genuine joy grows. In every moment, choose the radical joy that whispers: "He is good, all the time." That is the start of a great day, a great month, a great life.

January 27

Take a Breath

Today's Key Verse: "Pray continually." (v. 5:17)

It sounds like an impossible command, doesn't it? Pray all the time? Is the apostle Paul asking us to quit our jobs, ignore our families, and spend our days with bowed heads and folded hands?

No. He's asking you to breathe.

Prayer isn't meant to be a performance; it's the perpetual oxygen of the Christian life. Just as you don't think, "Okay, now I will take a breath," your heart can naturally draw near to God. Breathe out your concerns and your worries. Breathe in His love and care.

That worry you're chewing on? Turn it into a prayer. That joy that just bubbled up? Let it become an instant word of thanks.

Ceaseless prayer isn't about constant formal *kneeling*; it's about constant *leaning*. It's living with an open line to the Father's heart. It's the spiritual equivalent of tuning a radio to the right station, aligning your heart with the frequency of His love.

Maybe you think your prayers are too messy, too distracted, or too brief. You assume God wants polished prose and theological vocabulary. He doesn't. He wants *you*. **This isn't about perfection; it's about proximity.** The God of the universe isn't a busy

executive checking his watch; He is a doting Father who delights in every interruption.

When you stumble, whisper His name.

When you succeed, thank Him for His grace.

Every moment is an invitation to acknowledge His presence.

This continuous conversation turns ordinary time into holy time. It makes a commute into a chapel service and a kitchen counter an altar. You are not just going through your day; you are walking through your day *with Him*.

So, forget the idea that prayer is a task to be scheduled and completed. It is a relationship to be enjoyed. The goal isn't to be impressive; the goal is to be in tune.

Let the worries of this January day become reasons to look up. Let your needs become prompts. You can't stop breathing, and in a spiritual sense, you shouldn't stop praying. Keep the line open, the connection strong, and the conversation flowing.

Just keep talking to Him. He's listening.

January 28

Thankful Hearts are Healing Hearts

Today's Key Verse: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (v. 5:18)

We look at this verse and think surely God means, "For all the *good* things, give thanks." But He doesn't, does He? The command is singular and absolute: "In *everything* give thanks."

Don't wait until January is perfect. Don't wait until the clouds clear. Find one tiny thing today, right in the mess of things, and whisper a "thank you" to the Father. You may not feel like it, and it may not make sense to anyone else. But you are engaging in the "will of God." You are choosing faith over feeling.

A thankful heart is a heart that has already begun to heal. Exciting new research suggests that gratitude helps us recover from deep trauma by rewiring the brain, creating new neural pathways that counter trauma's negativity bias.

Gratitude is strongly correlated with greater dopamine and serotonin production. Dopamine is famously known as the "feel-good" neurotransmitter, while serotonin stabilizes mood.

This means that gratitude can help to change your brain chemistry, lifting the emotional fog that often accompanies trauma, helping you feel more alive and engaged.

Trauma can sharpen your focus on potential threats, making you more sensitive to negativity. But gratitude is like a warm lighthouse guiding you toward the positives in your life. By emphasizing joyful moments, gratitude helps shift your attention from what you fear to what nourishes and uplifts you.

God's commands are always meant to bring you an abundant life.

Thanksgiving is an act of holy defiance against despair, an anchor dropped into the deep certainty that God is good. All the time.

January 29

Keep the Fire Bright

Today's Key Verses: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil."
(v. 5:19-22)

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, given to indwell you at salvation. Think of Him as a fire within you, guiding, warming, and illuminating your path.

"Do not quench the Spirit," warns Paul. The Greek word for "quench" is used for extinguishing a flame.

To quench Him isn't a single, dramatic act of rebellion, but a series of small, neglectful choices. We turn down the volume of His still, small voice by prioritizing our worries over His peace, our distractions over His instructions, and our comfort over His call.

You are called to be discerning, not cynical.

When a friend speaks instruction, or a sermon sparks conviction, resist the urge to dismiss it with a doubtful eye-roll. Instead, bring it to the light of Scripture. Is it good? Is it biblical? Does it align with the heart of Jesus? Is it about the gospel of grace? If yes, hold on to it. But if it doesn't, run.

I'm always dismayed to see false teachers justifying their scams and abuse with claims of divine guidance.

Their teaching often amounts to performance-oriented, self-obsessed, guilt-focused, burdensome doctrine about the correct spiritual technique to get the power or wealth you desire. People follow these teachers because they often claim some sort of prophetic insight, a special word from the Holy Spirit's own mouth. They burn bright. Then they burn out. And they leave others burned in the process.

“But they seemed so nice!” people often say. Remember, discernment is not about *feeling*. It's about knowing Scripture well enough to see whether someone's character and teaching line up with the character and teaching of Christ. Child-like faith is not gullible faith.

Remember: Always be discerning. Never be cynical. Cynicism leads to throwing out the baby with the bathwater, abandoning the best aspects of the church because of the schemes and abuses of a few.

Cynicism also alienates the victims of these false teachers from you. There may be a day when they come to their senses. Will they remember you as the wise guy or the wise guide? As the one who always had a sarcastic crack or the one who always had an encouraging comment?

Let this be your simple prayer today: *Lord, keep the fire burning.* Your job isn't to manufacture the fire, but simply not to quench it. Keep praying, keep reading the Bible, keep worshiping, keep serving, keep holding on to the good. The Holy Spirit's fire will light the way.

January 30

Total Fitness

Today's Key Verses: "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. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it." (v. 5:23-24)

"Through and through." "Your whole spirit, soul, and body." He wants *all* of you. Not just your Sunday smile.

God isn't interested in a superficial makeover. He's in the business of complete renovation. It's easy to offer Him a piece here, a corner there. But verse 23 is talking about integrity, wholeness, completeness.

It sounds impossible. But take a closer look at today's verses. Paul is not telling you to do this. He is praying that *God* will do this. "May God Himself..."

The work is His, not yours. Verse 24 whispers the most profound truth a burdened soul can hear: "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."

This isn't a motivational speech; it's a divine guarantee. The God who initiated your salvation is faithful to complete your transformation. The same steady hand that flung stars into space is the hand guiding your life, shaping the rough edges of your character, and smoothing the anxieties of your heart. He doesn't start a project and walk away when the

going gets tough. He is reliable. His commitment to your wholeness is as sure as the dawn.

So, how do you respond to such unwavering love and limitless capability? With quiet trust.

The Christian life isn't a frantic sprint toward perfection, but a trust fall into the arms of a faithful Father.

Let go of the need to *earn* your wholeness; simply *receive* it. Rest in the assurance that the One who called you by name is actively, faithfully, and completely working to make you blameless.

He *will* do it.

Your job today is to show up and let Him.

January 31

Team Grace

Today's Key Verses: “Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God’s people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” (v. 5:25-28)

You’ve done it! You’ve made it through your “Great Start.” Thirty-one days of focus, thirty-one cups of spiritual coffee. Today, your journey through January draws to a close, much like Paul’s first letter to the young church in Thessalonica.

Look how the Apostle Paul wraps it up.

First, he asks simply, “Brothers and sisters, pray for us.” That’s a poignant reminder that even the strongest among us—even those writing Scripture—do not walk this path alone. They need prayer; we need prayer. We are all interdependent members of one body, sustained by mutual intercession. Your prayers lift the hands of people you may never meet, just as theirs help you.

Before you close this book and step into February, lift up a quiet prayer for those who need help in your family and church, and for those who, like Paul, teach and lead the flock. And remember, others are doing the same for you.

Second, Paul shares his affection and connection: “Greet all God’s people with a holy kiss.” (v. 26) In

that culture, this was the common, genuine way of saying, “I see you as my family. I love you.” This is not a casual handshake or a polite nod; it is a profound expression of belonging. It’s a reminder that you belong to a holy community, commissioned to love one another.

Let your interactions today be marked by that kind of intentional warmth. Look past the flaws, the irritations, and the differences, and see the imprinted image of God on your neighbor. Embrace them with a generous spirit and a forgiving heart.

Third, he asks that his letter be read to everyone—every single person in the assembly (v. 27) — ensuring no one felt excluded from God’s timeless truth.

Question: What do all three of these final instructions have in common? *Community.*

Pray for *each other*.

Greet *each other*.

Read this to *each other*.

Faith is not a solo ride. It is a team sport.

Together, the church is “Team Grace.”

And then there it is, the final, perfect bow on top of the whole package, Paul’s favorite benediction, the blessing I want to close our own time together with:

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

(v. 28)

Grace.

That's the point of every word in this letter.

Grace is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story. It is the unmerited favor of a God who loves you recklessly and relentlessly.

You didn't get this far by being good enough; you got this far because He is *for* you. Grace is what started you on this journey in January and grace is what will pick you up in February. It's the sweet, relentless, unshakable love of a God who has made you righteous through His Son.

As you finish this 31-day journey, carry this grace with you. May it be the peace in your struggles, the constant, unwavering assurance that you are deeply loved by the Maker of the stars.

Remember that today is not a finish line—it is a launching point. My prayer is that the truths you've encountered here continue to shape your days throughout the year.

The grace of Christ is with you. Always.

