

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

Thankful for Church

Goal for the Session

Tweens will give thanks for their community of faith as they read Paul's thanksgiving for the Thessalonians.

■ 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**

Focus on Your Teaching

Your learners, you hope, feel thankful for your church. Not all tweens do—any more than do all adults. Some tweens may resent time spent in church activities; others may have been hurt by people in the church; still others may see church as irrelevant. Paul’s words of thanks for the Thessalonians highlight the truth that God has lovingly chosen us to belong to Christ’s church (1:4). The way you teach and interact with these young people can help them claim your congregation, with its strengths and its faults, as a special community for which they can be grateful.

*Living God, may your Spirit help me to grow in my love for the Lord Jesus
and for his church. Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ Color Pack 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 29
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- ☐ materials for Gathering (see Resource Sheet 1)
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ newsprint
- ☐ markers
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ pens or pencils

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: 4" x 6" index cards, markers
- ☐ option 2: visitors to speak about your congregation’s history, video camera (optional)
- ☐ option 3: Color Pack 14, 15, 16, 17; drawing paper, markers

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, assemble the materials needed for the gathering ritual, according to Resource Sheet 1 (Opening Ritual). Plan to save these things for use in upcoming sessions. If you are using option 2 in Responding, invite one or more adults who are longtime members of your church to visit your group. Ask them to be prepared to tell one or two stories about times they thanked God for your church.

Welcome tweens by name and encourage them to talk about their week, naming any joys and concerns. Gather the group by singing “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 29; track 8 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024), lyrics on page 4. Following the instructions on Resource Sheet 1 (Opening Ritual), set the worship table and begin your time together in prayer.

Write the numbers 1–16 down the left side of a sheet of newsprint. Call on each learner in turn to provide a part of speech or other specified response as indicated on Resource Sheet 2 (Fill-in-the-Blank Fan Mail). Record responses on the numbered list. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 and read the letter in unison, filling in the blanks from your numbered chart.

Tell tweens that today’s Bible reading is a letter that is serious “fan mail.” It’s a letter in which the author praises an early Christian church—but reserves his greatest praise, as should we, for Jesus Christ. (For purposes of the next activity, do not yet identify the author as Paul.)

Paul is often pictured with a book and a sword because of Ephesians 6:17: “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The sword also represents Paul’s death as a martyr.

EXPLORING

Display Color Pack 9, 10, 11, and 12. Invite learners to compare and contrast these four pictures. Tell learners that these pictures all show the same person, but do not yet tell them that the subject is Paul (although you don’t need to deny the fact if someone guesses it). As needed, prompt discussion with questions such as:

- ✂ Why is this person holding a book or scroll?
- ✂ Why, in three of the four pictures, does this person have a sword?
- ✂ How would you describe the mood of each picture?
- ✂ Which picture do you like most? Dislike most? Why?

Tell the group that these are all images of the apostle Paul, the author of the Bible reading for the session today. Invite learners to list everything they know about Paul; record answers on newsprint. As needed, supplement their list with these key facts: Paul was one of the early Christian church’s most important missionaries; Paul preached about Jesus to Gentiles (non-Jews) as well as Jews; Paul organized many Christian congregations; Paul wrote many of the letters in the New Testament.

Display Color Pack 13, a map of the Mediterranean region in Paul’s day. Point out Mount Olympus, Athens, and Sparta, as learners might be familiar with these places from studying Greek civilization in school. Point out Thessalonica (thes-uh-luh-NI-kuh) and the paved Roman road—the Via Egnatia—that made travel and trade easier among several Roman colonies. Point out Philippi and Corinth, where Paul also organized congregations. Paul was probably in Corinth when he wrote 1 Thessalonians (see 1 Thessalonians 3:1–2 and Acts 18:1, 11).

Paul likely wrote 1 Thessalonians around 50 CE, about twenty years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. This letter is the earliest known piece of Christian writing.

Ask learners to find 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10 in their Bibles; assist as needed. Point out the names in verse 1. Silvanus (sil-VAY-nus), also known as Silas, was an early church leader who went with Paul on some missionary journeys (Acts 15:40) and perhaps acted as Paul’s secretary. Timothy was a younger colleague, whom Paul sent to help the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thessalonians 3:2–3).

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10. Invite learners to state Paul’s main idea in their own words. Then discuss:

- ✂ What part of today’s reading grabs your attention the most? Why?
- ✂ Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 2:1–2 and 2:17–3:5. Based on these passages, why is Paul writing the Christians in Thessalonica?
- ✂ How does Paul feel about the Thessalonians? What reasons does he give for his opinion?
- ✂ What do you learn from 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10 about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?

Paul is a “fan” of the church in Thessalonica, not only for what these believers are doing, but even more so for what God is doing in and through them. Together, ponder:

- ✂ What are you thankful for in our church? If Paul were to spend time in our church, for what might he give thanks?

EASY
PREP

God, We Sing

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *hope* anew;
Light this candle, light
the way,
Bring *hope* into our
hearts today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let *hope* be in our hearts
today.

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *peace*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *love*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *joy*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of Christ
anew;
Light this candle, light
the way,
We celebrate new life today.
Christ, be near us as we pray
And celebrate new life today.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use.

- 1. Postcards** Learners can imagine they are living in another city and thinking of their home church, as Paul thought of the Thessalonians while in Corinth. Distribute large index cards to serve as postcards. Working individually, have learners imagine a place they would like to visit someday and use markers to draw a scene of that imagined location on one side of the card. On the other side, have them write a note about something or some person in your home church for which they thank God. Encourage tweens to share their postcards with someone else in your church. If they wrote about individuals for whom they are thankful, suggest that learners give their cards to those individuals.
- 2. Thanks for the Memories** For what do the members of your church give thanks? Ask your guest(s) to tell one or two stories about times they thanked God for your church. Your guest(s) might also want to bring photos or worship bulletins from special occasions. Encourage learners to ask questions about the congregation's history and to offer their own perspectives on the congregation as it is today. As an option, record the session on video for other church members to view. As a variation or extension of this activity, have learners ask other church members why they are thankful for the church.
- 3. What Church Looks Like** To help tweens visualize what the church means to them, show Color Pack 14, 15, 16, and 17. Discuss: What do these images suggest about what the church is or should be? Which of these images do you like best as an image of "church"? Why? As time allows, invite learners to draw their own images of "church" and make a display of their drawings.

CLOSING

Gather around the worship table and ask tweens to share one thing they learned today about giving thanks for their church.

Invite learners to place their hands around Color Pack 8 on the worship table. Offer this prayer or one of your own:

God of love, thank you for letters like Paul's that help us discover more about you and more about following in your loving ways. Help us to live and love as Jesus taught. Amen.

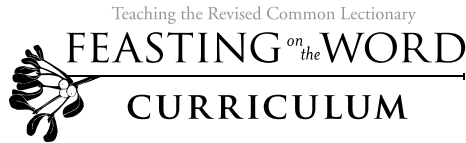
Lead the closing charge:

Leader: Let us go out into the world to live as Christ's servants.

All: Amen!

Extinguish the candle. Thank learners for coming, and affirm any positive contributions they have made.

October 22, 2023
Thankful for Church



Twins
Resource Sheet 1

Opening Ritual

(For use October 22 through November 19)

The season of Ordinary Time is the longest season of the church year. Sometimes called the season after Pentecost, it provides opportunity for Christians to think about ways to live as disciples of Jesus in their day-to-day lives. The liturgical color for this season is green, the color of growth and new life.

Materials Needed

- ☐ small table or sturdy box
- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ Color Pack 8
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ battery-operated candle



Ask learners to help you cover the table or box with the green cloth, recalling that green is the color for Ordinary Time (or season after Pentecost). Place Color Pack 8 on the table, and put the candle the middle of the circle of hands. Join in the following litany prayer:

Leader: We are in the season of Ordinary Time. It is a time for growing and learning.

Twins: We are learning and growing together.

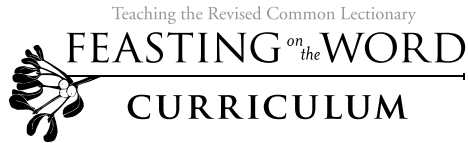
Leader: *(Place hand on table near picture.)* We gather together to share stories and help each other follow Jesus.

Twins: *(Place their hands on table near the picture to create another circle of hands.)* We are learning and growing together.

Leader: God's Word helps us on our way *(place Bible on table)* and the light of Jesus surrounds us *(light the candle)*. Let us pray:
Loving God,
We come together to learn more about you and your ways.
Help us to grow and learn together as we follow Jesus. Amen.

As the season progresses, invite young people in the group to take turns leading the prayer.

October 22, 2023
Thankful for Church



Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

Fill-in-the-Blank Fan Mail

Dear _____,
(1. name of celebrity)

I am _____ years old and I am your _____
(2. a number) (3. adjective ending in "-est")
fan! I own all of your _____ on video and have your
(4. plural noun)
_____ hanging on my bedroom wall.
(5. noun)

I really, really _____ your latest movie, "_____ of
(6. past-tense verb) (7. verb)
the _____." You were so _____, I couldn't
(8. plural noun) (9. adjective)
take my eyes off you! How did you get to be such a(n) _____
(10. adjective)
actor—and so _____-looking, too?
(11. adjective)

Could you please send me a(n) _____
(12. adjective) (13. noun)
of yourself?

I think you will definitely win the award for _____
(14. another adjective ending in "-est")
Actor this year. You're much better than _____.
(15. another celebrity)

Sincerely,

Your number _____ fan!
(16. number)