

Pondering Christ in 1 Thessalonians

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. My name is Jack. We're having a conversation about the word of the Lord as it was preached to us on Sundays and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

I'm here with Ben, Tristan and Jono. How are we going today?

Good, thanks, mate.

Very good.

Yeah, good.

It's a lovely, chilly Monday morning. We are pondering 1 Thessalonians today in Jono's sermon on 1 Thessalonians. Jono, you want to give us a quick recap of that one?

Yeah, sure.

1 Thessalonians has this great prayer in the first chapter that encapsulates a concise vision for living, walk by faith, known by love, voice of hope.

So I took that thesis statement and tried to track it through the next five chapters to discover what Paul said to the church at Thessalonica about faith expressed through love and filled with hope.

Yeah, fantastic. I felt, it felt like a little bit of a game of twister with the sermon because there were so many different aspects of 1 Thessalonians that we sort of touched across and reached over.

Yeah, it's a good one.

It was awesome.

Like a treasure hunt.

Yeah, it was. Tristan, your thoughts, your reflections.

My reflection of the sermon is yes, we touched on a lot of things, but it also, Jono, when you asked, like who does this remind you of?

Who is someone that you know is known for their faith, is known by their love, who's someone who's a healing balm, who's a voice of hope. That really helped me to reflect on all the different figures in my life that were those people.

And it reminded me of the importance of really tapping into the wisdom of the older side of the church that usually isn't tapped on to that much.

So that was a great encouragement for me to get to know more people in the morning service and just really see what they're thinking, what's their challenges. So that was good.

I was quite struck by that little line in chapter 2 verse 18, Satan blocked our way. And you raise the question of, or you raise the observation that earlier in the Book of Acts, the spirit blocked Paul's way, and also circumstance can block our way.

And so I'm really kind of left with that question of how do you discern the difference between Satan blocking our way, the spirit blocking our way, or circumstance blocking our way.

And the answer that you gave is faith, and the growing in faith is what enables you to discern the difference.

But I feel like that's a really important kind of piece to learn how to do well, because there's an enormous difference between Satan blocking your way and the spirit of God blocking your way.

So I wanted to jump on that idea of faith that you were talking about, Ben. And I guess start firstly by defining what we mean by faith. I know that seems quite simple to a lot of people, but I think it's worth us delving into a little bit.

And then how do we grow in faith? How can we actually, you know, Jono talked about thinking about people who are defined by their faith. And there are some people who just really radiate it.

How do we become more like people like that? So, but start by sort of giving us how you would define faith.

I got two ways of defining this. The first one is Hebrews 11 verse 1 says, now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. So, that's literally the Bible saying faith is.

The second thing is I once did a youth talk a couple of years ago on defining faith, and I gave the image of a BLT, like a bacon lettuce tomato sandwich, because the one word faith, which is *pistis* in Greek, has kind of at least three semi-distinct,

but related concepts of belief, loyalty and trust, BLT. Belief that faith is, I mean, we often kind of decry this aspect, but it's true that faith is intellectual ascent to an idea. It is. It's more than that, but it is believing that God is real.

Secondly, it's loyalty, which is the kind of...

Allegiance.

The allegiance to God, yeah. And then finally, trust, in the day-to-day aspects of our lives, to actually trust Him. So, belief, loyalty and trust is what faith is.

Very good.

I was thinking of Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Pretty cool. I'm not sure there's another spot in the Bible that would more clearly define what pleases God.

Paul refers to it in Romans 4. It's because Abraham believed. Funny thing is that he didn't then trust immediately.

He was up and down, but his belief showed itself in obedience. I think that's the key.

Yeah, I would say when it comes to defining what faith is, like the question, you can have a whole podcast episode on what it actually is.

But I would say that faith is an active relationship with God, and it's like a living relationship with God, with a deep reliance on Him. So it's not just an intellectual agreement or a contractual agreement, like, yes, I'm a Christian now.

No, it's a lifestyle. That's what your faith is, and that's how it's played out. It's a living relationship.

All of that said, how do we grow in that faith?

What does it mean to become a person who lives by faith?

The Bible says faith comes by hearing. So it's very important to come under God's word. It builds faith.

I think about that scene in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, where he reaches the Holy Grail at the end of the movie, and he has to do the step of faith thing, where he steps out into the canyon, not seeing the bridge, and then the bridge is

there. That's kind of like what faith is like. It's a muscle that grows as you test it. Anytime we live by faith and not by sight, which is 2 Corinthians 5 verse 7, you're kind of taking that step to see if God will come through on His promise.

And when He does, and He will, it builds the muscle of faith, kind of like Indiana Jones. When he took the step, he found that the bridge was solid. And so you take another step and another step.

And before you know it, you're a person who lives more by your faith in God than your sight in what you can see in the world.

I'm thinking about what Jesus meant when He said, ye of little faith, King James Version. I think He was looking for something very simple. Why wouldn't you just believe?

Some of the centurion who says, just say it Lord and it will be done. There's a confidence, really strong confidence in faith expressed in the biblical examples that inspire us, I think.

I mean, yeah, that's a good connection that when Jesus says, ye of little faith, it's in Mark 4 in the coming of the storm story. Because the disciples are there in the boat looking at the waves and the wind and the storm and the chaos.

And they're seeing by sight, not by faith. And so he says, no, don't look at the circumstance of the world, look at the Lord who is sleeping on a cushion in the back of the boat and trust him.

So it's this kind of difference between living by faith versus living by sight.

We can't please God without faith. God must be glorified. And I think faith expresses our belief that the words of the Creator are ultimate.

They're the ultimate words. So He has spoken. And when we believe and put our faith in those words over what we are seeing, but just what He has said, that's maybe the greatest way we can glorify Him.

And that's the chief end of humanity, to enjoy God and glorify Him forever. So faith is very core to our existence with God.

That said, so I want to push a bit deeper, though, in terms of how can I internalize that faith to the point where it becomes natural and just becomes a part of who I am.

Because we said, you know, learning to trust God, learning to believe in Him, there's a certain level which, oh yeah, I can accept that.

But then when I'm put into a situation, where there are other forces compelling me like, I don't really, I can't see God in this situation. How can I believe or trust in Him when it's difficult?

I mean, I just want to see like, how can we grow our faith to become that natural rhythm of our lives? Thoughts?

I'm always hesitant when we say when it becomes a natural thing, because I believe it's not a natural process, where you're just going to be accustomed, and you're going to be habituated to these trials that you're going to have, and your faith is

going to stand through. Yes, sometimes it does, but there's also a reason why there's seasons in our lives of deep trials, and we're navigating on how we can get through this by this road.

So, I think you can't go far with, then, the basic practices of going to church, reading your Bible, all these practical things that we've looked at over the past couple of weeks.

But I think when we say, when it comes to a point of it being natural, I don't think it is, because that's why I said at the beginning, it's an active relationship. It's that deep reliance.

If it's becoming natural, it's because you are still in that deep reliance on God. So without Him in the picture, it's not going to become natural at all. So that's my take on that.

It's important to have a bank of stories of God's faithfulness to draw on, I think.

Looking back on the faithfulness of God in the past is kind of the engine that drives our faith into the future. That even when I can't see God at work in this situation, I know that He was faithful last time.

And so maybe by God's grace, to your point, Tristan, maybe that will give me the faith to believe that He's present somehow in this situation. And then you start to look into the future.

We've spoken about this idea of reframe the past to see God's hand and then pre-frame the future to grow the muscle of faith to see that God will be present in my future.

And so I don't have to worry or kind of cling to what I see by sight because I'm learning how to live by faith. And it's all those practices that you spoke about Tristan as well.

Turning to look now, I found it interesting, Jono, that we had faith, love and hope, the sort of trifacta from 1 Corinthians 13. And I think it was a shorter segment on love in the sermon and that's okay.

But in 1 Thessalonians, Paul talks about the Thessalonians growing their love, to abound even more. What does it look like for us to have our love grow? Are we thinking about the breadth of love in terms of who we love or the way in which we love?

What do you guys think is the way in which our love increases?

It's probably both quantity and quality, that as the love of God is poured into our hearts for the Holy Spirit, which Paul says in Romans, that it causes us, it calls us to love wider and wider, more people, the way God does.

But at the same time, it invites us to love deeper and deeper, the way God does. So maybe it's both quality and quantity of love.

Yeah, fair enough. And so how do we cause that love to increase then?

We pray for it. I think that's what Paul does. There in 1 Thessalonians 3, verse 12, he prays, May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

It's not kind of something that you squeeze out of yourself, this will for the good of another, which is what love is.

But you pray, God, show me how much you love me, and that'll teach me how to love other people, because we learn how to love by being loved. And we are loved by the Father. And that overflows.

I mean, that's a cool image, overflow like a cup. The love of God poured into our hearts, overflowing into love for neighbor, and love for God, and love for everyone.

That's the key, isn't it? That love is coming in to overflow. And maybe it's good to think about 1 Corinthians 13, that the love that God is pouring into me, is that he's patient with me, he's kind.

He's not proud. Just all those aspects of love, I'm experiencing them from the father, and they flow through me. Love causes us to open our eyes and look for what is not loving.

So, I think love identifies that which is needing to be corrected.

And so, love causes us to act justly, and the more that we can engage in the love of God moving through His Church for the good of humanity and the glory of God, that's something that fosters love in us.

Sometimes, that could be anger, at injustice, at wrong, at evil. So, there's like faith. Faith isn't passive, and I think love is not passive either.

And the more that we engage practically in doing that which God wants to do in the Kingdom, we grow in our love, our capacity to receive and give love.

Turning now to hope, and you talked about us being a voice of hope, Jono. And you looked at 1 Thessalonians 5, 16 to 18, which says, rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in every circumstance. This is God's will for you.

And you said, yeah, some people wonder, oh, what is God's will for me? This is it. I guess I want to dig into what it means for this to be God's will.

Do we think of it as God's will as in this is a command, or this is what God wants for us to result in? I understand those are probably connected.

I just wanted to explore that a little bit more in terms of these outworkings of hope that is God's will for us.

We've been saying that the fruit of the Spirit flows through us, without us making it happen so much. It's like something beautiful and organic.

I think this letter, one of those strange parts of the Bible where Paul is like, make it your ambition to live a quiet life. Just work hard and be quiet. Whereas you'd think Christians are meant to be making a splash, having a real impact.

But it's really encouraging. What are we meant to do? How do we make it happen?

He said, just be grateful, rejoice always and be thankful and engage with prayer, with God, asking him to do the things that the kingdom, he would do for the kingdom to come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

I find that really encouraging. This is God's will for you. In all circumstances, be salty and filled with light.

Just be, there's a simplicity to it. And that is a hope-filled presence in whatever circumstance you find yourself in. A voice of hope, because it's like filled with faith and love, and that is impacting.

Some of us might have done the John Mark Comer Practicing the Way course. There was a video course that some of the Life Hubs did. And one of the episodes in that series had this great conversation about where does spirituality happen.

And there was a woman who was just saying, I don't get to choose. It's just very mundane. It's the normal life.

That's my setting. And that's what this is speaking into. Just wherever you are, don't be idle, but be useful and loving and hope-filled.

Yeah, I just went, I just jumped to 1 Peter 1 verses 3, with his praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And what I take from that passage is, Jono, when you said just be, it's like that quiet trust that we have, an outworking of hope into God's will for our lives is, it's bridging that gap between His promise and our daily practices of obedience.

That's what it looks like. It bridges that gap of just living in trust with God. That's like the hope that we cling on to.

So we take the promise, we bridge that gap, and it turns into those practices that we've been speaking about. That's what I see it as.

Following on in verse 5, I noticed, and you didn't address this directly in the sermon, Jono, I noticed there's this line, I think it's in verse 19, where Paul says, Do not quench the spirit. And I was interested by that.

What does quenching the spirit mean and how do we not do it?

I think it's very connected to what we were talking about before with the fruit of the spirit, which is the image that we don't try and become people of love, joy, peace, patience and kindness, but the work of God's Spirit in us produces that fruit.

The idea of quenching the spirit, I mean, my Greek dictionary says that the word *spenumi*, which is the word for quench, is to cause an action to cease to function, to extinguish.

And so quenching the spirit is like a tree suppressing the fruit, stopping the work of the Spirit.

Maybe what that looks like is us not partnering with the Spirit of God in our part of bringing the fruit of the Spirit into our lives, quenching the Spirit, suppressing His function in our lives.

Also, side note, there are three things that we can do to the Spirit in the New Testament, quench the Spirit, grieve the Spirit and blaspheme against the Spirit. And I don't think those three are necessarily very different from each other.

They all have the idea of discrediting or suppressing the Spirit of God in us that is aiming to bring about the fruit of the Spirit.

And that's deadly. I mean, the Spirit is in many ways the means of our salvation and our sanctification. And to blaspheme it or to quench it puts that entire operation at risk.

Jesus calls that the unforgivable sin.

I wonder if there's also a sense to which, when Paul's talking about, he's talking about quenching, this idea of the fire of the Spirit giving you a certain zeal and passion for the kingdom.

And Paul's like, don't put that out. Don't temper that. Embrace it.

Be on fire for the kingdom. Let the Spirit light your hearts on fire. I think there's, there may be a sense to which he's saying, yeah, embrace the passion that the Spirit is giving you.

And don't, you know, I think there are ways we can quench that by sort of maybe being pessimistic or trying to save our hearts from disappointment by not getting too excited about the Spirit.

So, I think it's Tyler Staten who says, we must put God in a position where He can disappoint us. We're not, you know, we need to be excited enough about God and trusting enough about God.

That, yeah, it is very possible that He would disappoint our expectations. And that's always the risk when you put your hope in something, when you get excited about something, it won't turn out exactly as you're thinking.

And I wonder if that's partly what He's talking about when He's talking about quenching the spirit. Like actually, yeah, be risky, be willing to not be chill about it.

And that's what faith is, is putting that trust in God.

There's a lot in the letter that refers to holiness, isn't there? I talked about one of the sort of peculiar, curious statements was Paul claiming to be holy and blameless. But he says it many times, to be holy and honorable.

At the end, just after what you were quoting in quenching the spirit, he says, May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. And that's the work of the spirit. So I think that's a big part of this quenching.

Don't quench the sanctifying work of the spirit. He's got a job. He wants to make us like Christ.

He wants to clean our consciences and let us know Romans 8 testifying deep within us to our spirit. You know, you belong. You're an adopted child.

You're good. We don't often think that that's holiness. Like, I belong with God who is holy.

No one can see God without holiness. So, yeah, the spirit's work is this progressive conformity to the likeness of Christ to sanctify us.

Well, let's turn now to some questions. We've got two questions submitted online for this week. The first question I'll read out.

With the main topics of this week's sermon, when Jono was talking about walk by faith, known by love and voice of hope, can all of these work individually or are we striving to have and live out daily all three?

They definitely belong together. I don't know if people listening remember this was a vision statement from Mosaic Church in California, which was led by a very dynamic, creative guy called Erwin McManus.

And in the late 90s, early 2000s, it was all the rage across Baptist churches in Sydney. Lots of them had ripped off this, and this was their vision statement.

And I think that the beauty of the statement coming from a very creative, dynamic guy was the fact that they work together. It's this step-by-step walk by faith, and as we are walking, we are interacting with people, we're known by love.

That church, they walk by faith, step-by-step, they're known by love, and they speak into the current situation of the day, the climate of the society. They're a voice of hope. So I think it's very important to have them together.

And the full package of that phrase is powerful. Walk by faith, known by love, voice of hope.

Yeah, it's no coincidence in 1 Corinthians 13 that Paul links them together and says, now these three remain faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. That's the easiest point there, but the three go together. It's no coincidence.

And our second question is about testimonies. So this person says, I know my testimony can bring hope of the goodness of God. I'm often reluctant to share my story in fear of rejection and ruining my reputation.

I know this is selfish, but I struggle overcoming this fear. How do I give this over to God completely? And is talking about my sinful nature and where I have come from glorifying it?

Thanks.

It's a very good question. I wonder if context is really important. I think the smaller, the more intimate the setting, the deeper the relationship, the depth of knowledge of one another.

Maybe that connects to the level of trust, safety that is there. And the deeper that is, the more detail you can go into.

But I think the point about how far do you go into telling your story of sin in front of a large audience, I think that's a very genuine question of how safe is that? And sometimes, there is a, what seems like a glorifying of sin.

Yeah, telling the juicy stuff that if you're immature, you could be doing that for the wrong reason. So I think it's a very good question that comes out of a place of love.

So yeah, I reckon there are times when it's absolutely the right thing to do, to tell your whole story. But just picking when that is is probably a good thing.

And especially, I think, if the sin you're talking about is something that other people in the audience might be struggling with and need the hope of getting out of, I think sin can be...

Your own story of coming out of sin can be really helpful for other people who are struggling with it. But yeah, also, as you say, Jono, you've got to be careful about what you reveal at certain times and places.

And yeah, it's very contextually based.

Lord willing, in a couple of weeks, we will be looking at a new series, Roads to Ruin. And that idea of a testimony is very helpful to simply say, I want to let people know I made a poor choice. I went down a certain path and it was not life-giving.

The Bible was true, God's Word was true. It warned me of it. And I went down that path.

And so we're going to be thinking of what we do with hurt, what we do with anger, even success, doubt, some of these roads that you can go down that can really be unhelpful.

I read in a book once that there are three different ways that you can tell your story.

The first one is as a hero story, which focuses on all the things that I did, my great accomplishments in a past life, with a great focus on me and my achievement.

The second one is kind of the flip side of that, which is a victim story, where you tell your story, your testimony, as all the things that I suffered, I'm, you know, this happened to me, and this happened to me, and I was a victim, and the world was

out to get me. But the third type, which is the story of the gospel, is a rescue story, not a hero story or a victim story, but your testimony exists to point people to the action of Jesus in your life, because He's the rescuer.

I think that's kind of helpful in walking that line between being honest about the way that I used to be without glorifying the sin, and without saying that I'm a victim of the sin that happened to me, because in this world, we are both victim and

perpetrator. The point of our telling our story is to point to the rescuer. That's what all gospel sharing, all testimony sharing should be about. That's a rescue story, not a hero story, not a victim story.

Excellent.

And so thinking about your own sin and sharing that, that is useful only insofar as it points to the rescuer.

And the emphasis of when you share your story should be on what Christ did to bring you out of that situation, not in that situation in and of itself.

Yeah.

Though my point is that love, love wants to ultimately point people to the gospel, but love also says, hey, just to let you know, don't go down that path. There's a line down that path, even without the gospel.

Absolutely.

It's just like, it's just loving to say, be careful. But I love what Ben just said, that's gold.

All right. Well, that might bring us to our Pallet Cleanser question. And I was thinking as we were talking, the Odyssey movie came out recently and I know, I think I'm the only one here who's seen it.

But I know that there are some good seafaring stories at this table. So I'm looking for stories, incidents that occurred on boats or at sea or at the seaside. Jono, I know you've got a bunch of these.

One of the classic ones for me is out with four guys in a little tinny that I had down in the Saddlund Shire.

So we're out the front of Gibbon Point. So it's pitch black. We're out the front.

And I know there's a bombora out there like a reef. But it's dead calm. It's just so, so calm.

We're out there, 12-foot boat. So it's something like that. It was maxed out with capacity with people.

And I've got a sounder and we're fishing. And I'm like, we were off the coast, but still floating. We didn't have an anchor down.

And then my sounder started going out. So we're out in the middle, like not the middle, but we're out in the ocean. And there's waves coming through, like a little bit of swell.

And my sounder goes off, and I'm like, what's the sounder? Oh, that's set to low, like shallow, shallow water. That's set to one and a half feet.

And we're out in the water on top of the bommie. Like it could just flip you immediately if a wave came. So that was a stressful situation.

I didn't say much to the guys. They just started the engine and they're like, What are you doing? What are you doing?

I said, I'm just moving. So that was praise God for safety.

Yeah, well.

Yeah, I was 10 years old. We went, my grandfather and I went on this boat ride off the coast of Durban in South Africa. And it takes you on this long boat ride.

And it was particularly choppy with white heads. It was not ideal weather for a boat ride. And obviously, being a kid, I wanted to be at the front, on the rail, over the water, just.

Titanic mode.

Yeah, just me and my grandfather on this ride.

And Leonardo DiCaprio.

Yeah, in the background.

And because it was so choppy, the boat kept going up and down, up and down, and I was holding on for dear life.

But it got to a point where we hit like a double wave. So you go up and then another one catches you, and the boat's basically at this, at a very tight angle. I'm literally supermanning it.

I got both arms on the reel in front of me, and my legs are in the air behind my neck, and I'm like, okay. Still haven't been to the front of a boat since then. So I love going out on boats, just not, I don't want to be flying while I'm on water.

So I don't have any water based stories that I haven't told in sermons.

19 of 19

Any good stories I have, I just share in sermons. So there's nothing. I'm going to pass on this one because I got nothing new.

Wow.

I also might have to pass, even though I asked the question. I have been on several boats, but they've all been like non-eventful, just very pleasant experiences. But that's okay.

That'll do us for this week then. Thank you all for listening. Thank you guys for coming on the pod, and we will see you next week.