

Season 6, Episode 1: 1 Thessalonians: Keeping it Real

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Sarah: This season we're really thankful for the sponsorship of Crossway, who have a long history of publishing excellent gospel set of resources. We're really excited to share with you some of their books through the season reasons. One of those is the excellent women of the Word by Jen Wilkins. It has fast becoming an essential read, and for good reason. Wilkins seeks to equip women to mine God's Word for all its worth, but not just for the sake of informing the mind and knowing the Bible well, but for the sake of loving Christ more deeply, seeking his face more fully, and thus being transformed into his likeness more and more. In so many ways, her book embodies what we're seeking to do on each episode of this podcast. Go and grab your copy from wherever you get your books.

Felicity: Welcome to two sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I'm in the States and I'm here with my sister Sarah and she's in the UK. And this episode is all about introductions to our new season, to us and what we're going to be getting up to over the next few weeks.

Sarah: Sarah, good to see you.

Felicity: What's in the cup and what's to nibble?

Sarah: I'm in the UK, but I've got an Australian biscuit, which is very exciting. It's called a tim tam. My parents in law went to visit family over there a few months ago and bought us back from Tim Tams. And I have to say it's very good. It's got caramel in the middle and it's like what we'd call a penguin in the UK. Chocolate covered.

Felicity: Oh, delicious. In fact, I actually came across them over here. They called them the American style Tim tams. I was like, Well, I'm not sure. Was the penguin first or the Tim tam first?

Sarah: That's the question, isn't it? What have you got?

Felicity: A disappointing show, I'm afraid, in that while I was in the UK, I forgot to shop for biscuits, so the cupboard is empty. Apart from I've got a stale chocolate hobnob.

Sarah: That's so disappointing. We even had some nice biscuits together.

Felicity: I know. I don't know what I was thinking. I just forgot. My husband even said to me the other day, let's have a biscuit with our cup of tea. I was like, yeah, yeah. Went to the cupboard bare. Nothing. I'm hoping some kind family member or something might send someone.

Sarah: Might never know.

Felicity: You never know.

Sarah: Tell us a little bit about yourself. What are you doing over there?

Felicity: I am here with my husband, Jonathan, and we have two little boys who are five and six, and I spend my time looking after them, and when I'm not doing that, I love to teach the Bible in my church. What about you, Sarah? Tell us about yourself.

Sarah: Nice. I live in London, west London, with my husband and our three children. We've been here about ten months now, so we're still kind of rooting ourselves in the area. My husband's the pastor of our local church, so that's what we're doing here, let's just say.

Felicity: Thank you so much, everyone who participated in our survey. We've so appreciated hearing what your feedback is. We really, really value everyone who took part in that.

Sarah: Absolutely. And we want to apologize for the biscuit influence. A few people could have mentioned that they're definitely eating more biscuits because of listening along to our nibbling of our biscuits. We're sorry, but not sorry because we're enjoying them still. I think you can.

Felicity: Joy enjoy, literally enjoy.

Sarah: So what are we seeking to do on this podcast? And what are we not seeking to do? Yes.

Felicity: Great question. We are seeking to get the Bible open, to talk about it, to apply it to our hearts, to drive it to the heart, to really let God's words sink in, not just in our chats, but into our lives as well. We are not experts, we're not trying to be Bible teachers. We've been doing this for a number of years, so not with each other so much, with other people. So it's kind of a part of what we're about as people is to get the Bible open. And we've just pressed record on that, really, haven't we?

Sarah: Yeah, so we pressed record in the last 18 months. This is absolutely the overflow of what we do offline. I think it's really important to say that, isn't it? It's not just something we saw out of thin air. This is the heartbeat of what makes both of us take in our local church ministries, isn't it? And we love doing this with people on the ground, but it's an absolute joy to get to do this with you as well. Overseen. And what's been it? So one thessalonians or first thessalonians, I hear.

Felicity: Indeed.

Sarah: First thessalonians.

Felicity: I have to say, when we were doing Habakuk americans call that habit, I thought maybe we had the better pronunciation. First thessalonians just sounds very nice. I think it sounds quite grand. Like first thessalonians. So I might adopt it, I don't know.

Sarah: You can adopt that. I think we can equally go for what you're familiar with. That's fine. Yeah. What's been your experience with the dressing in the past?

Felicity: I think, as I was getting into it this time around, I thought I haven't heard this taught as much as I had thought I had, if you see. I mean, I feel like I've heard quite a few oneoff sermons in it particularly in relation to Ministry and how we look after one another and that kind of thing. Yeah. I don't think I've really indepth studied it before, so I'm excited.

Sarah: What about you, Sarah? What's been your experience? This actually holds really precious memories for me as a letter. So this is the first book of the Bible that was opened with me just after became a Christian by a lovely woman called Susan and really showed me the power of God's word at work in me and at work through the gospel. It was the first book. I then opened with someone else as I chose to kind of then read the Bible with a student and I think I made an awful job of it. But yeah, at various points it's been one of those kind of friendly, kind of familiar books for me. And yet, actually coming back to it this summer and beginning to read it again, it's felt really fresh and I've really noticed stuff that I have never noticed before in it and it's been really exciting to come back to it. It's kind of an old friend but it's got a new I don't know, new take on it almost. It's the same letter, it's not just.

Felicity: It I know that but when I find when I read a book of the Bible in a different season of life, then often different things yeah, they.

Sarah: Pop up, don't they? Absolutely. So what's it look like for you to get the letter open? How have you started to get into it?

Felicity: I would say I've been reading it all throughout the summer, really as much as I can and listening to it as well. I'm finding that listening to it in different voices, not my own voice, one of these apps that you can listen to the Bible on and pen in.

Sarah: Hand, just kind of try to or many pens.

Felicity: Well, to be honest, I have one pen and often I can't even find that pen, so it's not a very carefully chosen pen which I appreciate is different from you.

Sarah: Yeah, I like a handful.

Felicity: Yeah, a very particular color. So yeah, I've actually spent quite a lot of time just praying it in. That's maybe a strange term, but that kind of praying in response to what I'm reading and trying to get my heart engaged and not just my head.

Sarah: Yeah, that's really helpful. I think for me it's just been remembering that this is a letter, so that means it's written by someone real to real people in a real situation and I think just keeping remembering that has been really good for me as I've been kind of getting into it, particularly with Paul's letters. Sometimes this hard stuff in Paul's letters isn't there and it feels quite confusing sometimes and actually just keeping remembering, oh no, this is written to real people in real situations. So that's been really helpful for me. This season

we're going to particularly have a think about something called Bible handling tools and I wonder whether you can just explain to us what are these Bible handling tools and how can they help us? Why, are they something useful?

Felicity: Yes, they are useful. So this is that time when you open the Bible and you're just not quite sure how to get into the passage, the book to work out what God is saying through that passage. And rather than being our first book of call, being a commentary or a sermon or whatever, which are all good things, but wanting to get into the Bible for ourselves and feeling confident in that, then Bible handling tools are just simple, literally tools that help us to kind of crack open the passage a bit. So it's something like the Bible timeline tool. So where does it sit in Bible history? The context tool, looking at something as simple as repetition or the tone and feel or how come this Old Testament quotation is here, what's it being used for? So we're going to be kind of helping get into first thessalonians through using these tools in hoping that we might be able to equip others to be able to get into the Bible for themselves.

Sarah: Nice. So give us an example then. So tell us about the Bible timeline tool. Now we've alluded to this in past seasons, but can you tell us explicitly what it is and how you're going to use it to help us get.

Felicity: Into the book of the Bible that we're reading? We want to be able to place it in the big arc of the Bible story. So salvation history, where is it? Is it pre cross? Is it post cross? Where does it sit? And the reason for doing that is to then be able to read it rightly, and apply it to ourselves. Rightly. So we can then compare where are we in salvation history? Where were the original readers in salvation history? So for example, with Thessalonians, we've got this little church in Thessalonica which was established after the resurrection of Jesus. Missionary Paul was the one who proclaimed the gospel to them. So they are in what the Bible calls the last days, that the last big event was the resurrection of Christ and the next big event is actually going to be Jesus return before then the new creation. And so we are actually in the same last days. We are waiting for that next big event as well. So that's really helpful to know because we can then actually read this letter and think while we're not specifically in the Thessalonian context, we are in a broad salvation history similar context. Sarah, tell I alluded there a little bit to the context, the context tool. Tell us how might that help us?

Sarah: Yeah, I think there's many different ways you can use the context tool, but just using, for example, just one simple way you can use it, just thinking about the general context of the letter. So remembering that when you read a passage in a letter or in a book of the Bible, it's never just in isolation, it's always as part of a bigger whole. And so actually we think about the letter to the thessalonians well, what do we learn inside the letter itself about thessalonica the place? What do we learn about Paul and Timothy who wrote to them? What do we learn about who the letter's for? What do we learn about these people who Paul is writing to? But we can also learn about the letter from outside the letter itself. And that's not just through kind of general history around and about. It's actually in the Bible as well, we've got Acts, which documents Paul's missionary journeys as he proclaimed the gospel. So you turn to Acts 17 and there we have documented for us what it looked like for Paul to priesthospel in this place. He was there for three Sabbaths, which basically means he was there for three or four weeks. That was it. It was almost like a kind of gospel hit and run. Like he was there and then riot happened because people did not like this gospel he was preaching, a number of people did, so it said a number of Jews, a number of Gentiles, and not a few prominent women. But riot started, they then had to flee the city at night. And so this fledgling church who'd only heard the gospel three or four times, really, and had been kind of converted through that, were then left and that was kind of it. And so he's writing into that context to reassure them that he was the real deal, that what he preached was the real deal as well. And he's encouraged them to keep going and wait for Jesus return and all that comes with that. Actually, using that context tool really helps you to then get into the start of the letter and read it with that in view. So I think the tools are really important, aren't they? And we're going to be using those tools as we go through the season. I hope it will kind of help people. It definitely helps us to be using them as we go through, doesn't it? But Christy, before we kind of round up, give us a little glimpse as to how this is shaping your heart, this letter. What are some big themes you're

noticing and how is that impacting your praying and just your kind of perspective, even over the last few weeks?

Felicity: First of all, I think just the tone of the letter has just become more and more evident to me. The way that Paul feels about the thessalonians is just overflowing with encouragement and assurance and love and just he is all in for the thessalonians to keep going. And that big thing that punctuates the letter, every chapter there's mention of Jesus return. And so I feel like Paul's kind of like, come on, guys, keep going. Because the certainty that Jesus is coming back is just huge. That's a perspective shape. And Jesus's return is not something that I think about very often, really. And the frequency with which it comes up in this letter has really challenged me to think, why am I not thinking about it more? Why does it not shape my thinking more? And the way that I'm living. That's been a big thing. What about you, Sarah?

Sarah: Yeah, I mean, that yeah, I mean, I just don't think I've seen before the how his return really is threaded through the whole letter. And it's the kind of backdrop, it's the lens through which we see everything else. And the letter, it feels like. And I think just pausing on that and just kind of it's challenged me in some of these Mondays days and summer holidays, actually, just thinking, well, actually, am I seeing this through the lens of Jesus return? Am I seeking to please Him because he's returning and because I want to be fit for that day? And I think, yeah, it's good, but I feel like I'm hungry to kind of get stuck into it more and really see how that's going to impact my days. Am I thinking? Am I living? I think also what's really struck me is just like how it's a together thing as a church family. There's a lot of one anothering, there's a lot of commands to do this all together as a church family. It's written to the church as a whole. And I think that's been just really encouraging thinking through yeah, actually, these people that I'm serving alongside my brothers and sisters in my local church family, this is it like, we're waiting for Jesus together, and this is a thing to do together, and that's my priority. And I think just kind of having that kind of beginning to just see the value and the beauty of that through this letter has been really good for me this summer.

Felicity: Yeah. And I think kind of in relation to both of those things that I've really noticed holiness being talked about in the letter, which I don't think I've really noticed so much before. That kind of and that togetherness a part of that is spurring one another on in this holy walk, striving in holiness. Also that we might be standing there on the last day when Jesus returns. And in my head, I just don't think those three things are linked very often, like, together as a church, encouraging one another and holiness and with Jesus return being the kind of the backdrop and the aim of it all. So I feel like there's a few big questions kind of looming around what are those connections and how does that work?

Sarah: I feel like I'm still missing the links here. I feel well, we are we're at the beginning, we're not at the end. It's okay. I'm not expecting to have all the links yet in place, but I feel like there's a hunger to kind of go deeper and really get a grip on what his flow of the letter and why he's saying things at various points and how Jesus return impacts that. But, yeah, I'm excited for that and Daunted as well. Because you want to kind of read it. Well, you want to read it.

Felicity: Yeah, I think, and that's a good thing to say to our listeners. And actually, as everyone reading the Bible, like those who are listening and us, we want to get it right. But actually, even just being in the Word together and understanding what we can from this, then God is working through His Word. And so it's okay. We're going to be okay. Even if we don't answer all the big questions, we're going to be enriched and encouraged by one thessalonians.

Sarah: Definitely. So, briefly, before we close, how can we make the most of this season in first thessalonians?

Felicity: I mean, as ever, we would say, grab a friend, sister in Christ, do it with someone else. We cannot speak more, like highly enough of just the value of doing it together. We so enjoy doing this together. And so we'd really encourage you to just be bold, be confident, just ask someone if they want to sit down and listen and read it and use the Show Note questions to help that conversation.

Sarah: A surprising proportion of people who answered our survey this summer didn't even know they existed. They do. We have some discussion questions in our Show Notes. The

Show Notes are the kind of text below where you press play wherever you listen to your podcast. There you will find three or four questions that just help you to have that conversation over a cup of tea with a friend and just encourage you to really drive this to your heart. 20 minutes. It's a snapshot of time. We want you to be able to kind of go further in your conversations with friends and so those are there for you to make the most of. And as we always say as well, we just really love printing out the letter, printing out the kind of book that we're doing and having freedom to just scribble on it and make notes and use those colors, use the highlights and just get stuck into it and read it for what it's worth. Justin, would you pray for us as we close?

Felicity: Absolutely. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word. Thank you that you are at work through it. And we pray that as we come to one thessalonians, that you would be softening our hearts so that we might know you better through this and love you more and want to live in light of Jesus return. Father, we pray that you do a deep work in us for your glory through our time in this letter, and we pray this in your name. Amen.

Sarah: Amen.

Felicity: Great. So we just want to say, really check out the Show Note questions, get a buddy and give thanks for joining us.

Sarah: So nice to have people listening. We so miss this and it's so good to be back. Thank you so much for joining us. And we'll see you next time for episode two, the Beginning of the Letter.

Felicity: Absolutely can't wait. All right, bye bye.

Sarah: Bye. This episode has been sponsored by Crossway Do. Check them out@crossway.org.