

Season 6, Episode 2: Real Faith (1:1-10)

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Felicity: We're so thankful to Crossway for sponsoring this season. They continue to produce excellent resources that help to build up the church and we're excited to be sharing one of their titles with you each week. I want to tell you about the biggest story Bible storybook written by Kevin De Young and illustrated by Don Clark. Breakfast in our House are currently accompanied by Devotions from here and we are loving these well written, often humorous, faithful stories. More of the Bible is covered than in other kids Bible. The illustrations are powerful and the Young brilliantly points it to Jesus all the way through. I would highly recommend for kids and adults alike. I think anyone aged six and up will love it.

Sarah: Welcome to two sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Sarah, I live in the UK. This is my sister Felicity, she lives in the States. And today we're very excited to be getting stuck right into the first thessalonians or one thessalonians chapter one. But first of all, we've got a wonderful question for one of our listeners saying, should we ever use a microwave in making a cup of tea? What do you think?

Felicity: I just love this question, and it's actually a question I have been asked a number of times over here, really just going to say outright, the answer is no. And the reason for that is I'm just not sure you can get the water hot enough in a microwave. And the thing is, over here, kettles are not your norm.

Sarah: So how long do you think you'd have to use a microwave for to get it boiling?

Felicity: I think that is the crux of the problem, because how do you know? How do we know? I mean, five minutes, but then you might be getting into explosive microwave kind of world. Water disappears, who need to put a.

Sarah: Lid on top of the crux or not?

Felicity: I'm going to say it could be done, but I do think it won't bring good results.

Sarah: Okay, yeah.

Felicity: On a more less microwave, less castle orientated question, sarah, we talk a lot about grabbing a friend to come and read the Bible with us, especially if you're listening along, why not do that? But the question is, why would you ask someone to read the Bible with you?

Sarah: Because it's so good, because it's just so good to read it with someone else. And we get so much out of talking it out, don't we? And what you bring to the conversation, I often haven't thought about. And it really spurs me on into reading deeper, I think. I just think it's the best thing you could do is to ask someone to read the Bible with you. I say that we've done this over years with a number of different people, so I guess we've tasted and seen that it's good to do it. But it can also be a daunting thing, can't it? You put yourself out there to ask someone. But no regrets. It's a wonderful thing.

Felicity: Yeah, no regrets. Because also the Bible is the word of God and so something's going to happen.

Sarah: Yeah, that too. Yes. What you bring to the conversation is so much better.

Felicity: Speaking of which, shall we read that word I'm going to read.

Sarah: I think it's really important to say as well. And we pray before we press record on these episodes. So we are praying that God's word will be at work as we open it up. We pray beforehand, we just don't start the podcast praying. And we've made that conscious decision. We pray at the end, but we don't pray at the beginning, but we have prayed before the beginning. Just want to clarify that for people because we are very aware that we absolutely need God's help to open this word and for that to be at work in our hearts. So I'm going to read chapter one, verse one to 10 and we're reading from the NIV version. Paul, Silas and Timothy. To the church of the thessalonians in God, the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced

by faith, your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you. For your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord. For you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia, an ACA. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia, an acre. Your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who rescues us from the coming rough.

Felicity: Thank you, Sarah. As we're going through this season, we're going to be intertwining Bible handling tools throughout our conversation and what we're really seeking to do is to help everyone to feel confident to get into the Word for themselves. And this week we want to be talking a little bit just about the context tool and it's a really helpful one to do at the very start of a letter because it helps us get our bearings as we get into this book of the Thessalonian. So we need to know that it's Paul and his crew writing to this church in Thessalonica. And if you want to know more about that, you need to have a read of Acts 17, where we get the kind of the back story to this kind of long and short of it is actually it's that it's short. Paul was with the thessalonians for a really short time. We're thinking, according to what we can gather from the Bible, is that it was maybe about three weeks, which doesn't feel like a long time, does it?

Sarah: So as we said last time, it was three or four weeks he was there and then he was suddenly not there. There were riots, people were not happy. A number of people were and they became believers, but number of people, significant people in the town weren't. And they were forced to flee at night. And this is the first that the thessalonians are presumably hearing from him since he scarpers since he had to flee. Yeah.

Felicity: It must be a huge moment when you hear from the person who gave you those words of life. And I think what we see, even just from this passage, we get a bit of their surrounding context. And if you have a look at verse six, we have they welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering, and that's a common theme throughout the letter. There is persecution and there are troubles. The thessalonians have received the Gospel, but it's definitely not easy living as a Christian in thessalon IQA at that time.

Sarah: Absolutely. And I think that then just is really helpful, having used that context tool to kind of place this in context. It really helps you to read the kind of tone of the letter. The tone of this first chapter as one of reassurance paul seems to be reassuring these believers that they are the real deal, that the Gospel has been at work in them. I think it's really striking how much God and Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is mentioned, that they're not on their own in this. They're part of a big picture story here and he's wanting to place them in context of the big story, isn't he?

Felicity: Yeah, that's really helpful because I think as a thessalonian, how you say it, Thessalonian that's it a Thessalonian, I think you might just be questioning and thinking, have I really got this right? Because life feels pretty hard. I thought Jesus was life and this life following him. You're going against the flow, aren't you, as a Christian in their world and actually in our world as well. So the assurance that Paul's giving to the thessalonians well, we want to be careful not to draw two lines too quickly, actually hugely assuring to us as well as we see the way in which God is at work in us as well.

Sarah: Yeah. And so it's good just to see the way God has been at work in them, isn't it? First of all, and the way that he chooses to assure them. So he says, first off, we thank God for all of you. You remember before our God various things about you, but you're loved by God, you're chosen and the Holy Spirit has been at work in you. And this is the evidence of how I can see it in terms of your joy, in terms of how you responded to the Gospel and that the Word has come with power. So I just think, wow, to hear those words when you are this tiny little kind of group of believers, but we don't know how big it really was. But you fledgling group of believers wondering, what did they say to us again? Was this really real, like about Jesus rising from the dead? Are we just been making this up or has this story

changed in our heads since they've told it to us? And actually, no, he's saying no. The Gospels come to you with power and deep conviction. The Holy Spirit is absolutely been at work and I know that because you've received this with absolute joy and then spread the news, which I'm known everywhere.

Felicity: And that's additional assurance, isn't it? So he says all these kind of big things to them, you've chosen your loved. And then he's like, look at the evidence of that and we see that as we see I just love that. Verse three description, your work produced by faith, your labor punched by love and your endurance inspired by hope. Like, these are people of faith, love and hope, aren't they? And as you then go down, you see the way in which they received the Word, as you were saying, and they ring out with their faith to all the believers, but even further afield. And then you get, I love this. In verse nine and ten, they tell how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from Heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus. And I think there's almost a sort of bookend of evidence, isn't it, like this love, faith, hope is evident as well in that description at the end. So there's no doubt for the thessalonians they are the real deal, the real gospel deal.

Sarah: And that is just pausing even on that last description of what has happened in their hearts and what happens as someone trusts in Christ. It's extraordinary, isn't it? Just actually reflecting on those. You've turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. So dead, lifeless idols, you've turned from them, you've turned away towards the true and living God, evidenced by Jesus being raised from the dead and he's going to rescue and come again. And it's just extraordinary that to just actually kind of comprehend the level of change in someone's heart. But that is only the Holy Spirit who can do that work, isn't it? And it's the word of God that brings that conviction that this is true and worth turning from everything that you've known in the past and turning towards the true and living God. Wow, it's true.

Felicity: And I think you read that, you're like, what? Why? How could that be possible? Such a radical transformation and then it sends you right back up to you. That verse five, because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, as you were saying. It's like a circular argument, isn't it? See the evidence, be amazed. And then, oh, no, that is because God himself is at work through his words that I mean, if we just take a step back from that, that's a huge kind of understanding of what is going on as the gospel is proclaimed, isn't it?

Sarah: Yeah. And especially that they were only there for three or four weeks ago. Just that kind of like, wow, how powerful, as the Gospels proclaimed, for people to be so thoroughly changed from the inside out. And for that to happen, and I think I so often feel like, oh, is the word of God powerful? Is it bearing any fruit, like day in, day out, even with my children, for example, or just in church life generally or whatever it is, you can say also my own heart, probably most of all, Lord, is this word really bearing fruit in my own heart? And actually just a reminder, yes, yes, it really does bear fruit. Like it really is that powerful to change people. And actually that same word that has happened in my heart, that has happened in our hearts, that change has happened and what assurance we can gather from these words for our own hearts in that as well.

Felicity: And I think that's a really helpful thing to do, read this chapter without kind of taking it as a bit of a battering, like, oh, am I really like this, actually look for the signs that are evident here in your life, but also that your fellow believers around you. I'm looking around at my women's Bible study and I am hugely encouraged because I think I recognize Thessalonian qualities in the people that are around me. And that is just hugely encouraging for me in that I think another thing that's going on here is and we're going to see more and more of this as we go through the letter, especially in the next chapter, is Paul didn't just proclaim the word, he actually lived out the word. And we see that verse six, you became imitators of us and of the Lord for your work. That's an assurance as well that Paul, he clearly was sacrificial in his love for them with his Gospel living and in that he was like Jesus. And that then is actually the passion of the Christian life. So as the thessalonians are suffering, as they're living out this gospel life, don't worry, this is the pattern. This is what it is to live out the gospel, but the power of that, not just say it, but live it, that seems to have had a huge impact upon this little church.

Sarah: Yeah, we're going to see much more of that next week, Aren't, which I'm excited for. I think what you're saying about just looking around where we are in our context is just really helpful, isn't it? I've been really challenged. I know the tone of this is an encouragement, isn't it? But I've been really challenged, actually, in how Paul is praying, the way he just casually says, we always thank God for all of you, and we continually mention the prayers and how thankfulness is the shape of this prayer for them. And actually, how do I start my prayers for my church family and my women's Bible, for the group and my house group? What's characterizing my prayers most? Is it thankfulness because this change has happened and I'm seeing the evidence of fruit of the Holy Spirit at work, like, yeah, I just I'm challenged on that and it's been good to kind of dwell on that a little bit and think, hang on a SEC, I think I need to change the way I pray.

Felicity: Yeah, that's a really good challenge. I think. What's struck me. I've just been dwelling on those verses nine and ten, and this essentially a description of the Christian life, like you were saying, the radical nature of that in order to be following Jesus, you actually have to turn away from other things that you're maybe tempted to put your hope in and then actually turn deliberately towards. I love that he says, the living and true God, like the assurance. They're like, no, you've got the right God, this is it, he's the one. And then this idea of serving, like, what it is to serve one another. So as a result of having turned, you will be wanting to serve one another and you will then wait with hope. And that is just a perspective shape of for me, I think it's really challenged me as I've been going through this last week, actually. That is the reality of who I am. This describes me and am I full of hope? Am I waiting well for Jesus? Am I dabbling in those things I turned away, or am I fully running in the Jesus direction? I think that's been quite a hard shift for me.

Sarah: And also, I mean, we haven't mentioned it, but right. Verse one that's linking back to what you just said is looking back to write verse one, isn't it? Whether his first thing he says to them is grace and peace to you. The only way, the only way that any of this is possible is through the grace of the Lord Jesus and the peace that the cross brings. And actually the fact that we can be rescued from the coming cross the fact that that peacemaking, death has happened and the fact that all of this is a gift and mark of grace, that's the tone of the letter, that's how it starts and that's how he wants them to kind of carry on, isn't it? In that grace, by living out that grace. And we kind of come on to see how he keeps his praise and he longs for them to be striving forward, living out that grace. But that's the starting point. It's not what they've done, it's not how much they've achieved, it's grace that's been given. The Lord has powerfully been at work and what a beautiful what a beautiful fruit is seen. Yeah.

Felicity: And that's maybe coming back to the context, that's maybe a helpful if you just take a step back as a bird's eye view. We have three prayers throughout the letter, so we see that it is all by God's grace that any of this is happening and the power of God at work. Which brings us back to that verse four and five. That really is what's going on here that God Himself is doing. It huge. We should pray in response. He's happy to pray for us there.

Sarah: I love that. Father, we just thank you so much that it's by grace and Your peace given to us that we stand in the same way as the thessalonians. We praise you for your word we praise you for your holy spirit at work we praise you for the way that you have given us hearts of faith. Father, we thank you for this wonderful description of the Gospel. Lord, there's so much to praise you for. And we just thank you so much for the beginning of this letter and we pray. Would we live in light of Your grace, Lord? Would we take this assurance deep to our hearts? And would it encourage us to pray with thankfulness for those around us who are also trusting in you namen?

Felicity: Amen. Thank you, Sarah. Isn't it so good to be back in the world together? What is it?

Sarah: It's so good. I'm really enjoying it and it's really nice. We're actually both studying this with our women's Greeks at church, aren't we? But it's really nice to bring those kind of it's all overflowing together. I'm really excited for that. It's really nice. For those who are new listeners and might not know, we have a monthly newsletter that we send out at the beginning of each month that just keeps you in the loop with things that we're enjoying in relation to one thessalonians and other such things. Maybe some Team Biscuit stuff as well.

If you'd like to sign up for that, the link is in our show notes. Until next time and see you next time. Yeah, we'll see you next week.

Felicity: Yes. Looking forward to it.

Sarah: Bye.

Felicity: We're so grateful as ever to Crossway.

Sarah: For sponsoring this episode.