

Season 6, Episode 9: Real Encouragement: Reflecting on 1 Thessalonians

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Sarah: This season is sponsored by Crossway. Confronting Jesus by Rebecca McLaughlin is a compassionate, winsome and articulate read. It's the sequel to her book Confronting Christianity and the pair worked really well together. The first tackling some of the big hurdles to considering Christianity and this new book, seeking to take those questions and sieve them through the lens of the Gospels and Jesus himself. It would be a great giveaway book for a friend wanting to think more deeply about the claims of Jesus or as a book to read together. But it is also wonderfully bolstering for believers to be reminded through Rebecca's sharp and rigorous style, that Jesus can be wholly trusted and he's absolutely worth it. Grab a coffee wherever you get your books.

Felicity: Welcome to Two Sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I'm here in America and this is my sister Sarah. She's over in England and this episode is our final episode in first thessalonians. We're going to be wrapping it up, reviewing it, considering what's really hit our hearts as we've been going through the book. Sarah, hello. I just need to share with you a discovery I've made in America. I've been living here three years and I've only just realized that when they say coffee cake, they don't mean that it's coffee flavored, they actually just mean any cake that goes with coffee or tea. And so I'm currently enjoying a cinnamon coffee cake, which I would not have picked up before, just a few weeks ago.

Sarah: In fact, that's quite a miss for three years.

Felicity: I know. I don't know how I have missed it. I just thought everyone was just really into coffee, which they are.

Sarah: Yes. I wouldn't actually pick up a coffee cake because I know that I don't like coffee. But what about a tea cake? Is that the same? Because a tea cake over here is like a toasted bit of bread with raisins in, isn't it?

Felicity: I know. I think you just undersold the tea.

Sarah: Cake there because it's a really good it's very good. I really do love a teacake, but yeah, you're right.

Felicity: No, I haven't seen a tea cake. I think they're unattainable over here. Is that the right word? Unattainable? Well, it's a good job.

Sarah: It's a good job we'll have another season to debate all cakes, then, isn't it?

Felicity: Absolutely.

Sarah: So what's been your favorite Bible tool? Let's get on to that.

Felicity: Yeah. A niche question for those who have been following our Bible tool threads. I got to say, the author's purpose tool is just I think it's the fundamental one. You come back to it every time and I love just that, really. It's basically just asking, why did he write it? Why is it here? What's it doing? I love that. So that is, I'm going to say, my bedrock. Yeah. What about you?

Sarah: Okay, well, it means nothing without the say what tool, though, does it?

Felicity: It's a fair point. Why? Because I'm being the author's purpose tool right now. Why?

Sarah: Yeah, well, mine is the so what tool, because there's no point knowing why without the say what.

Felicity: Oh, yes, you make a very good point.

Sarah: I think we can just have favorites because they're favorites. But I think we need the so what at the end of it all, don't we?

Felicity: Yeah. Without the so what? Yeah, it's just information, isn't it? Good.

Sarah: Which wonderfully. Paul has given us through the letter. He's given us the so what all the way through. And then right at the end last week, he was just like, boom, here's the real.

Felicity: Brick coming back to the author's purpose tool. He has also told us why he's writing it all the way through. So the kind of the big encouragement thrust of the whole letter, I think that's really helpful, isn't it? And then actually then that feeds into the so what. Are our hearts encouraged by what we've been reading in thessalonians.

Sarah: Let'S get back.

Felicity: Into the whole letter and taking a step back and just thinking through what's been going on, how we've been encouraged. But first of all, let's think about the three prayers that helpfully are at the start, the middle and the end. So get us into the whole letter there. Let me just remind us of those prayers. So at the very start of the letter, Paul praise. 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. And then if you flick on to the end of chapter three, you get the second prayer. Now. May our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May you strengthen your heart so that you'll be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. And then you go to the very end of the book and we have that mighty prayer at the end. May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your Holy 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.

Sarah: No, it's really good just having those read out just side by side, actually, because it really helps you to see that he's praying for the same thing all the way through.

Felicity: It's such a good kind of undercurrent for the whole book, isn't it? God Himself is doing it and strengthening hearts and enabling all of these things so that I love how clear it is that Lord Jesus is coming back. It's holding firm, isn't it?

Sarah: Yeah, it's all in light of that, isn't it? And the prayers just really help to kind of drive that home, don't they? And as you say, really helped to see that it's God at work in them. He's thanking them for and God enabling them to love and to be strengthened and to keep going. And he's the one who's ultimately going to be faithful to do it in them as well. It's amazing, which I think ties in with as we kind of gone through the letter, we've seen the Father, the Son and the Spirit repeated and repeated through the letter, haven't we? In light of Paul's absence, we've had so much of the presence of God in this letter, and we just see that really emphasized in these prayers that kind of carry the letter, carry us through, carry the thessalonians through every point. They can be in no doubt that God is at work.

Felicity: Yeah, just brilliant. Brilliant. And what an encouragement. Therefore, I think as we read Thessalonians, you see this all the way through, I thought, I want to be like Thessalonians, I want to be like Paul, I want to do this. I want to be that person standing firm at the end and all the way through. It's a reminder of our dependence on the Lord to in any way be these gospel people that are being described here. So I love that they're evenly spaced as well. So if you just yes, it's very satisfying, isn't it, the three pillars of the letter. Absolutely.

Sarah: That's very cool. Okay. Those prayers really kind of point us forward to Jesus returning, don't they? And we have seen that that has been the undercurrent of every part of the letter. So I guess one of the big questions for us as we go from this book, as we go from this letter, is, well, how do we have confidence in that future hope in just our everyday moments in the school run as I'm chatting to someone at the playground? If I'm working on a night shift, I don't work on night shifts. But if someone is working on night shift good. To clarify, sometimes I'll do a night shift, but it's not I'm not being paid for it part of life.

Felicity: Yeah.

Sarah: What does it look like to carry this through, to have this perspective that lives? So in light of Jesus returning?

Felicity: Well, I think actually the end of chapter one is helpful on that because he gives this picture, doesn't he, of someone who's turned to God from idols to serve a living intruder, God, and to wait for his Son from Heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming Roth. And I think that that picture of waiting because Jesus is

coming really helps me in my every day that I have turned to the one true God and I am serving Him. And that is all because I'm absolutely certain that Jesus is going to return. So everything I'm doing, it kind of works backwards, isn't it? I see Jesus return and then that impacts all that I'm about, including how I wait at the school gates or how I love my neighbor, literally, how I love my neighbor, the person who lives next door, the children in my house, like those neighbors as well. I feel like because of my confidence, which I think has increased through reading thessalonians yeah, for sure that I'm more likely to let that perspective infuse everything in my everyday life. Yeah, but then what that? I was just thinking as I was saying that, what does that actually look like in kind of the nitty gritty of it? Have you got thoughts on the kind of playing out of that perspective?

Sarah: I've recently started writing things on my hands. I used to do it when I was studying for my degree or A levels, and I've just gone back to doing it to remind myself of the truth of the gospel. And I think possibly if I start rewriting, he's coming back on my hands more, I'll be remember and I'll live in light of that more. I've been really struck with whatever I've written on my hand for that day. I've been trying to do it with what I've been reading in the Bible, just like one word. And it's really, really helped me to meditate on that truth through the day and actually just visually being able to remind myself, he's coming back. This is worth it, what I'm doing right now, live in light of that kind of truth, he's coming back and do it with all my heart. So that's just one niche way.

Felicity: Niche, but brilliant. Sarah I like it. I think one thing that's really helped me has been seeing how holiness and this kind of being established in blamelessness, which is instructed kind of throughout, especially in the second half of the book, how that links into helping me wait for the Lord Jesus to return. As I think previously, I've maybe just separated it a bit and say I know I'm supposed to be holy. And then there's Jesus's return. But seeing that as I strive to be holy, as I strive to love other people and do all the things we looked at last week, that is actually going to help me to stand firm upon Jesus's return. And so then the more certain I am that Jesus is coming back, the more I really want to strive to be holy, because I think that's going to help me to be standing when he comes back. So I feel like my view on holiness has just shifted a bit, I think, to make it more integral to normal life.

Sarah: Yeah, that's helpful, isn't it? I think it is the everyday just talking about it as well, isn't it? We talk about what we're thinking about in life, like our mouths are the overflow of our hearts, aren't they? So the more we're dwelling on his return, the more we'll talk about it to ourselves or to others or not just to myself. I do talk to myself.

Felicity: It's a long history of people talking to themselves. I think in biblical terms, it's called preaching the truth to yourself, isn't it? Which we're supposed to do all the time. So it's okay. You're on safe ground.

Sarah: I was, like, walking along the road to school the other day. My oldest son was walking behind us, and I was like, do you want to catch us up? I was like, no, I'd like to talk to myself. Okay, that's brilliant.

Felicity: I love that. I love that. Let's do more of that. Yeah.

Sarah: Talking about it with each other really helps, though, doesn't it? Just have it on our radar more. Okay. This has been a letter of encouragement in so many ways, hasn't it? So hopelessly. Give us your big encouragements from the letter.

Felicity: Well, I just keep on coming back to chapter one, verse four. For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God that's chosen you because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit spirit and deep conviction. And then if you add into that two, verse 13, we also thank God continually. Because when you receive the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accept it not as a human word, but as it actually is the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe that? Which just threads through the whole letter that God is at work, through his word, by his spirit, that this is not just human words. These are the words of God. That is so encouraging to me because I think it can be tempting to think that nothing's happening, church can seem small, or my desire for the Bible can sort of wane and wax depending on my mood. But actually, every time we open the Word, every time we we speak these words, god is at work. And I think that's really encouraging on a just confidence that God is doing his thing and it's dependent upon Him rather than anything that I'm doing. It's as simple as just getting the Word open. What about you?

Sarah: I think that's been really bolstering for us together, hasn't it, this season as we've opened the Word together and we're very aware that we're recording our conversations. But this has been a really bolstering thing to do together and just dwell on that together, isn't it? And through all the I have wobbles, I have questions about whether we should be recording our conversations. And Flissy are very good at just kind of tempering me with this truth and helping me to see the value of this truth and just we're opening the Word together and the extraordinary thing that's happening as we do that that's.

Felicity: So true, isn't it? And that's our prayer, really for this podcast, is that as we get the word open, that God Himself would work through His Word, not through our words, but through His Word. And that's what we keep on praying, isn't it?

Sarah: Yeah, there's so much, isn't it? There's always so much. We come to the end of each thing we're like. There's so much, just a really simple thing. But the encouragement matters. That Paul's encouragement really matters to the thessalonians. This letter would have meant the world to them to be encouraged to keep going. And as we seek to take that encouragement and give it to others, he says, encourage the disheartened. How often do we feel disheartened in our walk with Jesus? Because it feels hard. It feels hard to keep going. And actually, just the simple kind of value of encouragement, bringing courage to one another, to keep going until Jesus returns, just the real value that's been placed on that in this letter. And to see that that encouragement involves reminding one another of the trees of the gospel, reminding one another that it's worth it, keep going and love one another wholeheartedly as you do that it's so simple in so many ways, isn't it? Like, that's not rocket science at all. That's just living out the gospel life, isn't it? But we've seen Paul do that in this letter. We've seen him encourage the thessalonians and we've been exhausted to do the same and I want to do it more.

Felicity: And I think that's so true and that as we've been reading thessalonians, we have been encouraged. And so therefore we know what it is to be encouraged. And so why wouldn't we want to encourage others? In that? I think you're right, that can only forget. But encouragement is just a huge thing.

Sarah: But it takes intentionality, doesn't it? So Paul was very intentional in what he wrote. We've seen as we've kind of used the Bible tools, we've seen the way that he's structured this letter, we've seen all the care that he's taken to encourage them in the pertinent ways and the ways that they've needed. And actually that takes prayer, that takes intention, that takes insight, that takes the Lord really directing how we can encourage others. So that's been another thing I'm taking away, actually. How much time am I setting aside to intentionally think, what will it look like to encourage my brother and sister this week? Whether that's my husband, whether it's my children, whether that's my Bible study group, members of my church family, or just people who I'm trying to share the gospel with. What does it look like? Just, I think just stepping back and taking time to think through how can I encourage them?

Felicity: I love that. That's a really good idea. I need to do more of that as well. Yeah, but I'm kind of spurred on by this, like this being the heart and it's God who does that work. But we're almost deciding where to place God's work, aren't we? Obviously he's in charge of it all, but then how can we get God's word open? Or how can we speak his truth? I've been really surprised, I think, by how the letter really does come together as a whole. And I know that sounds obvious because it is a whole letter and it should have accepted that, but I feel like before we were studying it then, it felt quite busy and I knew there was this bit about what it is to love people and this bit about Jesus return, this bit about one another. And I think it's been great just to see how the threads all connect together and that the whole impact of the thessalonians is a mighty encouragement, but also a perspective shifter that as I see Jesus's return in light of everything else. And so that just changes everything, doesn't it? This is a holistic impact that this led.

Sarah: Yeah. And it's just praying. It's just praying for that impact, isn't it? It's just praying that the Lord would really seal this on our hearts and help us to walk in light of it.

Felicity: Yeah. Do you want to pray for us in that vein?

Sarah: I'd love to. Let's pray. Our Father, we just thank you so much for all the ways that you have encouraged our hearts as we read this letter. We thank you so much for the challenge within it. We thank you so much that we've needed to hear it in this season.

We've needed to hear more of Christ's return and what it is to live in light of that wonderful breathtaking truth and that hope that we have. And so, Lord, we join with Paul and we pray. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify us through. And 3, may our whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Praise you, Lord, that you are the one who is faithful, the one who calls us. You are faithful, Lord, and you will do it. We thank you for that. Sure hope that we have. Our Lord, would you help us to go from here, living in light of these precious truths that we've been dwelling on? For your glory, we pray. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Well, the end of first, thessalonians sad times, but we have a bonus episode coming up, don't we? So just in case you're feeling that sadness that I feel like Sarah is close to tears over there, don't worry, we have a bonus episode coming up, so watch this space. And in the next two or three weeks, we will be releasing a bonus episode indeed.

Sarah: And we always love to hear from people listening along week by week. So why not email us? Podcasting sisters@gmail.com, we'd love to hear how you found this season in one thessalonians. What struck you? What have you taken away from it? So we'd love to hear from you. Do email us and we'll see you see you soon. For that bonus.

Felicity: For the bonus. And then we will be back. Season seven is in the offing, but after Christmas. All right. See you soon. Bye.

Sarah: Bye bye. We're so thankful for Crossway, who've been sponsoring this season.