



Sermon Growth Guide

August 17, 2025
Find your Pattern



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Find your Pattern, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-7

Key Verse: 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5. “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.”

Big Idea: Life in Christ grows best in the soil of consistent worship.

Foundations

What if the pattern of your week could shape the pattern of your life?

In 1 Thessalonians 1:1-7, Paul writes to a young church that’s not just surviving persecution—they’re thriving in faith, overflowing in love, and standing firm in hope. Their story is electric: the gospel came “with power, the Holy Spirit, and deep conviction,” transforming idol-worshippers into models of Christlike living for an entire region. Paul calls them a community worth imitating.

As seasons change and schedules fill, we have a choice: let the ebbs and flows of life set our rhythms, or let worship anchor everything else. When we make gathering with God’s people a non-negotiable, week after week, something happens. We’re shaped. We’re steadied. We become the kind of people who can endure hardship with hope and overflow with love that points to Jesus.

The Thessalonians didn’t have easy circumstances, but they had an unshakable center. You can too.

Understanding God’s Word

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-7 together. How does Paul describe the church’s “work,” “labor,” and “endurance”? What is the source of each?

What does it mean that the Thessalonians became “imitators” and “models” for others? What does their example teach us about living faithfully under pressure or persecution?

Compare Acts 17:1-9 with 1 Thessalonians 1:1-7. How does the background add to your understanding of the letter?

Applying God’s Word

How might you set—or reset—spiritual rhythms in this season so that worship is your anchor? What could it look like to “set your pattern of worship so your pattern sets your life” this fall?

If someone were to “remember before God” your church like Paul did, what would they thank God for?

Where do you need endurance right now? What truths about Jesus can inspire hope in that area?

Witnessing God’s Word

Who are the people you consciously imitate in your faith? Who might be imitating you? How might your small group or family become a “model” of Christlike living for others in your city?

I came across a story this week about a man who refused to attend church. When a pastor asked him why, he answered, “I don’t go to church because every time I do they throw something at me.” The pastor laughed a bit and said, “What do you mean!?” The man went on to explain, “When I was just a baby and my parents took me to church, the minister threw water on me. And THEN, when I got married, the wedding ceremony took place in a church, and they threw rice at me!” Hearing this, the pastor quickly responded, “Well if you don’t start going to church more often, the next time you do I’m afraid it’ll be when they throw DIRT on you!”

This is a lot of people’s experience of worship, of church. A friend pointed out this week that many people show up for hatching, matching, and dispatching! Friends, we know that our habits—our patterns—will either drain us or sustain us. And we know that the practice of consistently gathering with others to worship God is critical for our souls.

Over the next few weeks, we’re going to dig into First Thessalonians. Their story is electric: the gospel came “with power,” and idol-worshippers were transformed into models of Christlikeness. They didn’t just survive persecution—they were thriving in faith, overflowing in love, and standing firm in hope. The Thessalonians didn’t have easy circumstances, but they had an unshakable center of gravity as they were fueled by the Holy Spirit and their pattern of life together, and we can experience this as well.

We get the background for this letter in Acts, chapter 17. Paul and Silas are released from prison in Philippi and continue on their missionary journey, landing in Thessalonica. They only get to stay for a short time—three Sabbath days, less than a month. They share the good news about Jesus and have “some Jews” and a “large number of Greeks” join them. And with that, the church expands to Thessalonica. The Jewish leaders start to get nervous about this Jesus-movement, so they round up some “bad characters from the marketplace (17:5)” (you know how it is when you’re at Costco...) to start a riot. Several people are arrested, and the new believers urge Paul and Silas to go on to the next town for the safety of everyone.

Later, Timothy makes it back to Thessalonica to visit with the church and gives Paul a positive

report. Despite “severe suffering (v. 6),” despite persecution and martyrdom, the Thessalonians are still walking with Jesus and are eager to hear from Paul. So Paul begins his letter to this young group of believers with encouragement and a reminder of how this whole operation started: “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” (1 Thessalonians 1:1-3).

What do Paul and his companions celebrate about the Thess church? Work. Labor. Endurance. The Thessalonian church is a hive of kingdom activity! They’re moving forward, continuing on, getting up each morning and facing the day, not knowing if it will be their last. Paul and his team admire their grit and resolve, and he reminds them of the source of their fortitude. In verse 3, he says their work is a product of their faith. James 2 tells us that faith without action—faith without works—is dead. But that’s not the case in Thessalonica! Their faith in Jesus is overflowing into tangible Kingdom works. They are spreading the gospel and changing their community.

Paul also says that their labor is prompted by love. In John 13, Jesus gave his followers a “new command,” a new mandate: “Love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” That’s what the Thessalonians are doing. They are selfless. They’re practicing agape love: the self-sacrificing love that mirrors God’s love for his people. Paul notes that their endurance is powered by a hope that comes from Jesus. This young church is rooted in the confidence of Christ’s resurrection and future return. They’re facing brutal persecution and great suffering, yet they stand strong in the hope of the gospel.

This is an amazing church! I wonder, if we were to hold up a mirror, where might we see similarities and differences? First Pres has a long history of Holding Fast, Loving Like Jesus, Deploying Generosity. Have you been part of that work? Have you experienced the joy it is to be part of this kind of community?

Paul continues: “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” (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5a). God has graciously called the Thessalonians to himself, and with that comes a dramatic departure from the lives they had lived before! Acts 17 says that some Jews and a “large number of Greeks” responded to the preaching of Paul and Silas. This young church has turned from idol worship, pagan rituals, and rampant sexual promiscuity.

And their conversion occurred not just through logical arguments and by linking Jewish prophecies to Jesus, but through “power, the Holy Spirit, and deep conviction.” It may be that there were miracles and other signs. It is certain that people experienced significant life transformation and rebirth—that the Holy Spirit moved in the hearts of the hearers so that they became open to the truth of the gospel. Paul goes on: “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 and Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:5b-7).

Perhaps you’ve heard the ancient Jewish blessing: “May you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi.” The idea is that you might stay so physically close to your teacher—that you would be mimicking him so closely—that the dust their feet stirred up would end up clinging to you. This is what the Thessalonians did. They learned to live, to work, to worship, to study, to eat, to treat others like Paul, Silas, Timothy, and ultimately like Jesus. They became apprentices of Jesus, and, in this, they became a model and an encouragement for people all up and down what is now modern-day Greece!

They experienced vibrancy and resilience and full life because of their commitment to Jesus. We’re spending the next month in worship on a short series intended to help you find your Pattern, find your People, find your Place here with First Pres. We’re doing this because we believe that a thriving, flourishing, overflowing, love-filled, meaningful, vibrant life is possible. That life begins when you turn your heart over to God, when you acknowledge Jesus as Lord and invite him to sit on the throne of your heart.

It continues as we move into relationship with one another as a community of faith. And it grows as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and as we participate in disciplines and service of others and patterns that form us more into Christ-likeness.

We know that the pattern of your week gives shape to the pattern of your life. This is certainly true as we think about diet and exercise. The things we eat and how we move our body day after day, week after week, inform the shape our bodies will be in. The same is true with spiritual diet and exercise. Hebrews 10 begins:

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart... let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

There is a call here for the Hebrews to continue faithfully gathering for worship. It seems that the fallacy or myth that it’s possible to be a Christian all by yourself was alive and well in the early church, just as it is today. And they had even more reason than us to give up worshipping together! The Hebrews are experiencing persecution—imprisonment, suffering, confiscation of property—much in the same way as the Thessalonians. Their lack of worship attendance is less about busy schedules, and more about the risk they take each time they gather. It’s potentially unsafe for them to gather with the church for worship! Yet there is an admonishment here: this persecuted church is called to “not give up meeting together” for worship.

But why? Why risk gathering for a couple of songs, some prayers, and the reading of Scripture when you could do that kind of stuff on your own—when you could just listen to Christian radio, listen to a sermon podcast, and pray on your own? In part, it’s because we need one another. Scholar N.T. Wright says, “Every Christian needs the encouragement of every other Christian. Everyone who comes through the door of the place of worship, whether it be a house in a back street or a great cathedral in a public square, is a real encouragement to

everyone else who is there.” This is a large part of how we spur one another on. This is a significant piece of our encouraging of one another.

There’s a story about a young man who had a vibrant faith at one time but felt that he was losing it. So he started spending his weekends outdoors—camping, hiking, skiing. One evening, the young man was sitting beside a fireplace with a mentor of his, a wise, older Christian man. As they were sitting together, the young man began to describe where he was at in his faith. He described a disconnectedness, an unsettledness, a restlessness he hadn’t really experienced before, and he couldn’t quite put a finger on why that was. As the young man continued talking, his mentor reached into the fire with a pair of tongs and took out a red-hot coal. He set it on the hearth, and before long, the glow had gone out of the coal. It looked like it had gone dead. A moment later, without saying anything, the mentor picked up the coal with the tongs again and put it back in the fire. Within a few minutes it was glowing again, red-hot. The young man understood the point.

We need one another. When we pull out of the pattern of gathering for worship, we go cold. Friends, our spiritual lives thrive when our rhythms are communal and consistent.

Perhaps you can remember autumn 2017. If you were here at First Pres, you might remember going through a sermon series together called “First Things First.” An image sticks in my mind from that time. Our artist community constructed a giant mobile that hung in the plaza with all kinds of items hanging off it. The installation was incredible, and the idea behind it was so powerful. With a mobile, you need to hold the main string or support. Once you grab that, you’re able to lift it up and it creates something beautiful. If you hold it by the wrong appendage, it will get all clumped up, tangled, and messy. The image we were meant to walk away with in 2017 is that we must put the Lord first. When we put God first in our lives, in our hearts, in our calendars, everything else falls into its correct place. Our home life, work, and relationships hang in the right way.

And that’s the invitation before us again this fall. I recently learned about Jeff. By the time Jeff arrived at the front door for the football game, he’d already missed kickoff. His friend, who was hosting the party, asked, “Jeff! Why are you so

late?” Jeff replied, “Well, to be honest, I couldn’t decide between going to church and coming over for the game. So I tossed a coin.” “Okay,” said the friend, “but that couldn’t have taken that much time?” To which Jeff replied, “Well, you know... I did have to toss it 37 times.”

You’re not going to have to work that hard to miss worship this fall. The world will place countless demands on you in the coming months. There will be football games, soccer practices, cross-country meets, weddings, business travel, out-of-town visitors, rain, snow, leaves to hike through, early season ski days. Those are good things. Some are fun things, some are obligations, some are the reason you moved to Colorado. But when we fall out of the discipline of worshipping with the body week after week, we are at risk of malformation. Recreation is good, but it doesn’t accomplish the same thing as the discipline of consistent worship.

One of St. Augustine and Martin Luther’s favorite descriptions of humanity is a “man curved in on himself” (*incurvatus in se*)—self-focused, self-absorbed, self-centered. Worship is the practice of weekly “un-coiling and de-centering,” weekly moving out of selfishness and putting God at the center.

We want to help you “Find Your Pattern” this fall. And that means living counter-culturally. “Finding Your Pattern” is a call to place worship on your calendar before anything else, and to keep that locked in place. When you do this—when you commit to coming week after week after week to be called into worship, to confess your sin, to be reminded of the grace we experience in Christ, to join your voice with hundreds of other people in offering prayer and songs of praise, to look side to side and see others from all ages and life stages, to affirm the Ancient Creed, to offer a portion of your finances to God’s mission in response to the good news of the gospel, to encounter God’s Word proclaimed, to receive a blessing and be sent out—you will be formed and shaped in unexpected ways, and things will fall into their proper place.

Friends, your habits—your patterns—will either drain you or sustain you. The practice of consistently gathering with others to worship God is critical for your soul. Join us as we commit to a pattern of putting God first this fall!