Dedication

To the church in Thessaloniki:

Alive.
Awake.
And beautiful.
Every step of this journey bears sand from your shores.
May the fresh breezes of the Holy Spirit among you
stir into gales of great revival in Greece.
You were marked on the map for faith
the day a man named Paul
swept through your gates with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
Rise up from the ruins, resurrected and radiant.

You marked my heart forever,
Beth

łemάνης 1:4 Μέσα του ἦταν ζωή και η ζωή αυτή ἦταν το φως των ανθρώπων
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About the Author

BETH MOORE has written best-selling Bible studies on the patriarchs, Esther, Moses, Paul, Isaiah, Daniel, John, David, Jesus, and James. Breaking Free, Praying God’s Word, and When Godly People Do Ungodly Things have all focused on the battle Satan is waging against Christians. Believing God, Loving Well, and Living Beyond Yourself have focused on how Christians can live triumphantly in today’s world. Stepping Up explores worship and invites us to reach a new level of relationship and intimacy with God.

Beth and her husband, Keith, are devoted to the local church and have the privilege of attending Bayou City Fellowship in Houston, Texas, where their son-in-law Curtis Jones pastors. Beth believes that her calling is Bible literacy: guiding believers to love and live God’s Word. Beth has a passion for Christ, a passion for Bible study, and a passion to see Christians living the lives Christ intended.

Beth loves the Lord, loves to laugh, and loves to be with His people. Her life is full of activity, but one commitment remains constant: counting all things but loss for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus, the Lord (see Phil. 3:8).
CHILDREN OF THE DAY is designed for both interactive personal study and group discussion. Here are a few suggestions for making your time with the study more meaningful.

First, to enhance your learning and application of Scripture, the study is written in an interactive format. I encourage you to complete all of the written work in your workbook. This isn't just fill-in-the-blanks. The interactive questions represent the very places where we'd look together in Scripture as we shared a cup of French roast coffee together. Please don't let the word “homework” scare you. The Holy Spirit uses your efforts as you respond to the activities in your own words.

Second, to enhance your group time together, you'll find five Principal Questions and five Personal Discussion Questions each week. The Principal Questions alert you to look for information as you study and prepare for group discussion. They are marked with a solid dot like this:

○ This is a Principal Question. “Principal” means “of chief importance.”

Your small group will likely discuss the Principal Questions when you meet each week. In addition to the Principal Questions, you will find Personal Discussion segments identified by a circle like this:

○ This is a Personal Discussion Question designed for personal sharing.

These learning activities help you personally apply the material by relating the events to your own life. They give your group a core of shared items to discuss. Your small group will allow time for you to share your personal discussion responses, but you will not be required to share unless you so desire.

As an aid to group discussion the Principal and Personal Discussion Questions appear on the viewer guide pages along with the page numbers of the questions in the text. For the sake of space, the questions on the viewer guide pages may be less detailed. They are intended to remind you of the questions you completed during the previous week.

Oh, how I wish I could be personally present with you each week in your personal study time and in your group time. This interactive format provides the most personal contact possible until the time we can share that cup of coffee. Then I’ll look forward to listening to you as you have graciously listened to me through all these studies. I pray that you will gain as much from this journey as I have. Thank you for the privilege to serve you.

This may be our first series together and, if so, I pray with all of my heart that this in-depth study and others like it will fan a lifelong flame in your heart for God’s Word. Perhaps we’ve studied together before and, if so, I’m thrilled to tell you that this one earned its own place in my heart. Each series from A Woman’s Heart: God’s Dwelling
Place to this one has been used by God to accomplish a distinctive and lasting work in me. The mention of each name stirs up the remembrance of that prevailing revelation.

I won’t tell you in advance what God worked in my life through this journey, because the fun of it for me is to process the material along the way with you. When I penned week 1, day 1, for instance, I had no clearer idea where we were headed than you do now. When you get to difficult material, you will see that I am struggling through it too. When you’re convicted, you can know that my stomach is turning upside down as well. I love the uncertainty of what’s ahead as long as I’m in the security of God’s hands. It’s like driving a winding highway in a convertible for the very first time. I want to feel the wind in my face. If you do too, we’re going to make good traveling partners.

This time God placed on my heart the idea of offering you options. Goodness knows we need a few of those amid frantic schedules and demanding roles.

You get to choose your own level of participation.

**LEVEL 1: Participate in the video sessions only.**

Through the years I’ve watched women drop out of weekly Bible study because they couldn’t keep up with the homework. Don’t think for a moment that if you can’t do all of it, you’re better off doing none of it. A shorter time in Scripture is far better than none at all. Watch the video sessions even if you can’t get your homework assignments accomplished. You have LifeWay’s blessing to copy the viewer guides for this purpose.

**LEVEL 2: Participate in the video sessions + do the weekly homework assignments.**

Moving up to level 2 in which you meet with God on the pages of Scripture numerous times each week exponentially increases your experience. When you turn the last page, you will truly know the Letters to the Thessalonians and the important circumstances surrounding these first books of the New Testament. If you’ve got the stamina to do the homework (and you do!), you’ve got it in you to view the sessions. Keep in mind that many of the larger themes are addressed in the sessions, so try your hardest to view the coinciding ones at the end of each week of homework.

**LEVEL 3: Participate in the video sessions + do the weekly homework assignments + handwrite the two books to the Thessalonians.**

I’m really excited about this level! For only the second time in my nearly 20 years of writing Bible studies, we’ve arrived at books of the Bible short enough to invite this exercise. During the first session of this series, we’ll get acquainted with the circumstances that inspired the writing. Then in sessions 2 through 9, and the corresponding weeks of homework, we’ll study one chapter per week. Each time we come to a new segment of the letters, I will ask you to read it then handwrite it in the back of your member book on pages designed for this exercise. If you don’t choose level 3, you’ll simply read the portion—without a hint of self-condemnation, I pray. This option is simply available for those who want to take the next step to retain what they’re learning.
LEVEL 4: Participate in the video sessions
+ do the weekly homework assignments
+ handwrite the two books to the Thessalonians
+ memorize the books.

Trying to picture some of your faces almost has me tickled. But don’t blame me. Remember all those women who kept asking for more? Blame them. Beloved, if you commit to all four of these levels, the Letters to the Thessalonians will live in the marrow of your bones—probably for the rest of your life. You’ll find a short tutorial in the DVD bonus material that may help you if you’re interested in this level.

Needless to say, we’re not recommending that anyone try to memorize both books in the nine short weeks of this series. In the tutorial, I suggest a chapter a month for a total of eight months, but the best recommendation is whatever works. Since this time we’re studying two short books, you might even memorize just the first. If you do, I think you’ll be so hooked you’ll have to go on to the second.

Because God led me to take this challenge, in the process of writing this study I’ve recited the eight chapters aloud more times than I can count. The exercise continues to bless me beyond what I could have imagined. Think about it! Pray about it! Then, some of you, do it!

OK, Sister, which level seems the most doable for you right now?

1  2  3  4

I’m asking you up front because I’d like to challenge you to go one level above what seems reasonably attainable. If you’re willing, stretch yourself one more level! If you’re pretty sure you can reach level 1, try stretching yourself into level 2 and see what happens. All you overachievers, keep in mind that higher levels and harder work won’t make God love you any more than He already does. Nor will memorizing the two whole books make us superior to someone else who can barely manage a few sessions. We are secure in Christ and acceptable to God through Him.

We have nothing to lose here but much Scripture to gain if we’re game for a challenge. Do only what blesses and not what burdens.

I’d like to say one last thing to you. I believe in experiences like this. I believe in Bible studies and God-centered books. I believe He can use them to change your life. A subject doesn’t have to be new; it just has to speak to the predicament you’re in right now.
May I pull back the curtain about publishing here for a minute? You’ve heard of the little boy who was an excellent archer and always hit his target. But his mother watched as he first shot his arrow, then drew a target around where the arrow landed. Publishing is a bit like that. First you write the book. Then you write the introduction telling where the book is headed. It just works better that way. Makes it look like you knew it all along.

Well, in this case I’ve reversed the order. Here is a note I wrote expressing my heart on the way to Greece at the very beginning of this journey. It matches my reality just a bit. You and I are in this together, so come along and let’s get this journey off the ground.

I write you with an inkjet full of joy at an altitude of 25,000 feet on Aegean Air flight 530 from my layover in Frankfurt on the way to our destination. Under the plane a solid floor of bleached white cumulus clouds reflect the sun so brilliantly that I can only hold a glance out the window for a moment without my eyes watering. My youngest daughter, Melissa, is sitting two seats to my right, reading the Scriptural text in Greek that will take on such life for us in English.

What you may not realize is that you too are on this flight with me and will not leave my thoughts on this trek for a single waking moment. For whatever reason—probably the ailing economy—the plane is sparsely populated and most of the seats around us are empty. I smile as I fill them with you in my imagination. Your eyes are a little bloodshot from your previous nine-hour flight. The hands on the world clock sped so rapidly that night lasted a total of three hours. You were then spilled out of the plane abruptly at your body’s own 1:30 a.m. But let’s try not to think about that.

Let’s also give one another grace for the way our hair looks right now. Plane-head can be decidedly worse than bed-head simply because you have no bed. Instead, you lash around with gnashing of teeth in a seat that won’t go flat. You get restless leg syndrome even in your arms...
and neck, and you long for a world of friendly skies in which men either have had their adenoids removed or are forced to remain awake.

Through the years, I’ve met enough of you face-to-face to know how different you look—all so beautiful to me—and what diverse stories you have. Along the Bible-study way, God has done what we yearned and begged for. He has enlisted us from every conceivable background to study together. We’ve discovered that we don’t always have to see a sight the exact same way to be thankful to God that we beheld it together. Let somebody else search the world over for the handful of people who line up with them 100 percent on every point of Bible interpretation. I’ll gladly choose the larger community drawn together by these unbreakable bonds: the life, death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God.

Did you hear that over the loud speaker? The pilot just announced our final descent to our destination.

Thessaloniki.

Welcome!

Beth Moore
In today’s opening session, we’ll turn to the first of two letters we’re studying, and we’ll give ourselves completely to the first four words. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and record them here:

________________, ________________, and ________________


1. Silas (Silvanus) entered a ________________________________ by a ________________________________ (Compare Acts 9:26-28.)

   In preparation for the next point, compare specific wording in Acts 15:39 to Hebrews 10:24. The Greek lexical term used in both verses is *paroxusmós* (English “paroxysm”).

2. The ________________________________ that can ________________________________ can also ________________________________ (Prov. 27:17).

   Now let’s see the third member of this party of three added to the mix. Read Acts 16:1-5.
3. The ____________ ____________ we ____________ could become one of the ____________ people in our lives.

Fast-forward to Acts 17:1. Follow it up with verses 2-10.

4. A journey ____________ ____________ could lead to the exact ____________ of ____________ God is looking to use.

As we dedicate ourselves to the task ahead, we’re going to reach ahead long enough to snatch a phrase out of 1 Thessalonians 4:9: “For you yourselves have been ____________ by ____________.” This English phrase is drawn from one rare compound word in the Greek: *theodidaktōi*.

➤ Look inside the back cover for the map you can use throughout this study.

See Beth live! Visit www.lifeway.com/livingproof for her event schedule.
Week One

The Lord’s Message Rang Out
Day One

The Church of the Thessalonians

FLASH-FORWARD: Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace. 1 Thessalonians 1:1

A week ago I met the church of the Thessalonians, at least a sliver of it. Not the heaped-up relics of the one addressed by Paul centuries ago—though I did see a disturbing number of skulls in one ancient house of worship. The church I met was made up of the spiritual descendants of that small band of believers birthed with great travail in Acts 17.

You see, the lungs of Scripture did not deflate with the dying gasps of the original recipients. Paul may not have envisioned the church I saw recently, but the Holy Spirit speaking through him certainly did. Though my daughter Melissa and I had traveled to the other side of the globe to serve this gathering of Thessalonians, we were ill-prepared for the impact they’d have on us. When the doors swung open to the auditorium, women poured into the room like a waterfall coursing through the fingers of God. The clock struck seven, the lights went down, and the first slide in our opening worship showed a pair of wide-eyed Dorothys that we were a long way from Kansas.

The spotlight of three languages washed away my nearsighted vision and sprung my heart wide open to a warm ray of divine splendor. I’ve ridden wings of planes to multiple foreign fields and have listened with piqued curiosity to the sounds of distinctive languages, but never so many at once. The voices bringing the words to life animated the atmosphere with an indescribable beauty. All five hundred of us in that lovely theater were singing the same praises to the same musical score, but with confessions of faith flowing from three native tongues interwoven into one victor's wreath cast like a crown at Jesus’ feet. From the sense of His presence, He seemed as pleased to be enthroned among us as we were to have Him there.

Instead of creating an atmosphere of confusion, the languages fused like long lost friends who’d searched the world over to find one another. A foretaste of glory tipped our tongues—a deposit toward that day when we, “a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one [can] number,” will stand “before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9).

The Greek over the Bulgarian and English seemed fitting. Throughout our week in Greece, the modern variety of the language surrounded us, but the words resembled the ancient tongue of the New Testament enough to stir in us a feeling of continuity. We
sensed that the original plan remains underway, and a thousand years is as a day to our God. He had foreseen our gathering in 21st-century Thessaloniki through those who had first professed Christ on that same beach.

**Note how Jesus referred to this continuum in John 17:20:** “I pray not only for these, but also _____________________________."

On the eve of His passion, Jesus lifted that first band of Thessalonians before heaven in the cupped hands of His intercession. God knew the exact number of those saved in the initial gospel tide on that eastern Greek shore. He has written each name one by one in the Lamb’s book of life.

The opening video session recalls how the message of Christ first came to the Thessalonians, but let’s make sure we all begin our written work on the same page. Even if you participated in the session, please read Acts 17:1-4 and respond to the following.

1. **To what location did Paul and Silas first go in Thessalonica?**
2. **How many Sabbaths did they serve in Thessalonica—2, 3, or 6?**
   - Carefully read Acts 17:2-3. What method did Paul use in his approach to the Thessalonians?
3. **Compare the relative number of Jews who were persuaded in Thessalonica to the number of devout Greeks (Acts 17:4).**

The comparison doesn’t indicate that the church in Thessalonica was more or less than it might have been had the tables been turned. It simply informs us that the original covey of believing Thessalonians was largely Gentile—a statistic that will color the pages of both Bible books before us. Trying to decide which is more beautiful, Jew or Gentile, is a waste of ink. The shades are equally bold but rightfully distinct.

If you’ve studied the Book of James, perhaps you recall the Jewish texture of the body of believers James served. We now behold the flip side of a Christian movement still wet behind the ears. One last question from the segment:

**How many leading women joined Paul and Silas? __________________**

I am a woman called to serve women, so statements like “a number of the leading women” jump out at me. You may be the last person on earth looking for a spotlight, but if you’re a woman who pursues God and serves people in this
carnal culture, squint your eyes in the spotlight’s brightness. You are “among the number of the leading women,” and you count, Sister. All it takes to lead is for people to see you following Jesus.

Remember our earlier reference to Christ’s prayer in John 17:20? That He prayed for those who would believe in Him 20 years later in Acts 17 is not the astonishing part. What most amazes me is that He also prayed with fervent intention for those who would believe in Him today.

I stared into the faces of those Thessalonian women, seeking to memorize each like someone drawing a mural with colored chalk. Nameless, faceless people don’t set my heart ablaze to share the Scriptures. Real, warm-blooded, distinct-looking, God-seeking, problem-ridden women do.

As I write, I try to imagine you and the place you call home. I wonder whether you’re right- or left-handed, whether you draw your eyebrows down when you study or raise them up. We’re not colorful clay that God has rolled into a ball of gray. We are thousands of ones, each present and accounted for on the cross. When we gather in Jesus’ name, we are exquisite in our distinctiveness to Him.

Name three specific characteristics that make you different from your family or friends (tastes, learning style, personality). As you do, try to appreciate your distinctiveness as a child of God instead of resisting it.

At the close of our first session in Thessaloniki, my friend Chris offered a Scripture-engraved invitation for women to receive Christ as Savior. Our hearts exploded as a crowd 60 people long and several people thick pressed to the platform’s edge. Before my very eyes “the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 2) multiplied. The thought was almost more than I could bear.

Would you believe that you rolled into my mind the very next moment? My thoughts did somersaults from Christ’s reference to those first disciples in John 17 to those original Thessalonians fewer than 20 years later and on to those newborn Christians gathered right before my eyes. I thought of the wonder of God’s Word: the marvel of Scripture etched by the breath of God on the page with every earnest reader in all of human history in mind.

In the address, printed in the first verse of 1 Thessalonians, Paul pictured the faces of those original Thessalonians: some Jews, “a great number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women” (Acts 17:4). But what about the Holy Spirit pouring words through that quill of a man? Ah, now: He pictured us all.
So let’s gather around the letters postmarked Thessalonica. Lean in like the throng at the altar. Don’t let pride or timidity come between you and the presence of God. Press in tightly, professing Christ. You’ll be in the company of others but also known intimately by name, circumstance, and condition.

You have a place here—a purpose unique and substantial, not merely some spiritual reality, floating like a fleck in the air.

This is your journey to the shore of Thessalonica, so write your personal signature (use your whole name) and a slice of your biography as you’d introduce yourself here in this sand.

If you know what your given name means, share it here. If you don’t know what it means, consider doing some research and adding it.

How would you describe your present circumstances (in the margin)?

This is where we begin. Your circumstances are not coincidental in your journey. God’s timing is impeccable. We have before us real words for real crises, real medical diagnoses, real afflictions, real relationships, real doubts, real concerns, and real fears.

For those willing to participate, we’re adopting the discipline of writing 1 and 2 Thessalonians in the back of our workbook as we go. The brevity of the books makes it feasible. I commit to you with a grin that, if we ever study the Book of Jeremiah together, we’ll forgo this discipline.

Please turn to page 214 and write 1 Thessalonians 1:1 in the Bible translation of your choice.

I’m ecstatic that we’ve landed together on these Thessalonian shores. Let’s not brush the sand off quickly. Let’s sit awhile and let the tide come in and wash our eyes with fresh vision for eight beautiful weeks.

We don’t always have to see eye to eye to be glad we’re side by side. Let’s pat the sand beside us and welcome each other along.
Day Two
We Recalled

FLASH-FORWARD: We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:3

“We” is an amazing, empowering word. We are so much stronger than I am. We study so much harder than I would. We believe God for so much more than I could. This tiny, two-letter word is the driving force the Holy Spirit used to push the pen across the scroll and roll it all the way to Thessalonica. Let’s flip some pages of contrast so we can fully embrace the word “we” during the next eight weeks. Glance at the very first verse of the following letters and note each of the names of the writers/senders.

Abbreviate below using the first letter of each name. I’ll get you started by answering the first two:

Romans P
1 Corinthians P & S
2 Corinthians
Galatians

Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 Timothy

2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon

Star the epistles attributed to one person. Circle the ones attributed to two people. How many of the letters are attributed to three people?

• Now look at the first verse of each letter to the Thessalonians. Who were the writers/senders?

An intriguing anomaly appears in the introduction to Galatians. Additional senders are listed but unnamed (see 1:2). Who are they?

First Thessalonians and Galatians are widely accepted as Paul’s earliest letters. One characteristic, however, sets 1 and 2 Thessalonians apart from Galatians—Paul retains the plural touch almost throughout. He makes several detours into “I,” but “we” predominates. In Galatians, Paul refers to the brothers with him but thereafter addresses the recipients personally.

So, what’s the big deal? We are, that’s what! Over and over in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Silvanus and Timothy are tied up together with Paul by the leathery ribbon of that little inclusive word. Don’t lose sight of that for a moment.

As you copy 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 in the back of your workbook, write the word “we” in capital letters.
Notice that the word appears first in reference to prayer and recollection. “We always thank God ... We recall.” We can have no intimacy with God without our individual pursuit of Him, but we also possess an intrinsic need to be part of a team. Our fellow God-chasers challenge our stale prayer lives and loosen the latch on our locked-down thanks. When we’re tempted to claim that God has not been good, their very presence begs to differ. They are mercies of God stuffed in crude human form imprinting decent memories on a difficult time.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 says to “pity the one who falls without another to lift him up.” It’s easy to fall alone but, Girl, it’s hard to get back up.

Think back on a harsh season of your life and record a good memory —perhaps even a funny one—you carried out of it because of the company of others.

Now look carefully at 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and document three specific things Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy recalled in the presence of God.

In the Greek, Paul gave it a drumbeat. Say these phrases in the margin several times aloud, and you’ll hear the rhythm for yourself.

When I’m in a particularly negative mood, three thoughts come to me with those phrases: Faith can be work. Love can be labor. Hope can get long.

We hear much hairsplitting over faith and works, but does anybody else occasionally think that faith is the work? Believing what we cannot see can sometimes be the highest high in the human experience, but at other times it’s like inhaling fire. And just try to convince me that love is never a labor.

The NIV translates the phrase as “your labor prompted by love,” but multiple translations cast love as part of the labor. One scholar translates the Greek as “toil of love.” That’s even better. Sometimes loving comes easy. Other times, it nearly kills us. Does your heart feel like a nail to a hammer right now?

Without using anyone’s name, how has loving been difficult in your experience?

The toil of love climbs to its Everest peak when it is unreturned. Since God has promised to make us like Jesus and because rejection was Christ’s relentless companion, we likely won’t run low on opportunities for unrequited love.
Trying to love a spouse who doesn’t love you is torturous. Trying to love a stepchild who wishes you didn’t exist is demoralizing. Trying to love a friend through a baffling fiasco is exhausting. Human affection can’t bear up. We need a Romans 5:5 kind of work.

**What does Romans 5:5 describe?**

We have access to the Holy Spirit welling up in us like a spring. Tapping into Him requires deliberation and cooperation so God can love through us. Like me, you’ve probably asked Him to love through you, then fizzled out within the hour. Here’s the catch: we cannot love when we perceive ourselves as unloved. We cannot offer to others what we don’t possess.

Jude 21 says, “Keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That means practicing the mindset of being profusely loved by God. We must invite our souls to plunge into His love like a dolphin romping in the sea. Actively engaging in His unending, extravagant, no-strings-attached affection for you is not narcissism. It’s necessity. It can mean our survival when we’re faced with loving the loveless.

Glance back at today’s “Flash-Forward” and fill in the blanks: your work of ______________, labor of ______________, and endurance of ______________.

Consider also 1 Corinthians 13:13, penned by the same apostle, Paul: “Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love.” Those comprise the three abiding priorities and enduring virtues of time and eternity. These facts alone earn each of them a distinct spot on the Enemy’s target. Anything God emphasizes, the Devil seeks to exterminate.

Let’s examine a short checklist:
- Are you in a season where faith feels like hard work? Yes/No
- Is loving laborious? Yes/No
- Is hope circling the drain as you keep longing and waiting? Yes/No

If you answered yes to all three questions, you’re under a triple threat. Satan can’t snatch faith, hope, and love from you. You have to hand them over.

When spiritual people are down to the dregs, we often grip tighter to what we have left: our legalism. We fill up the loss with the law. Don’t go there. Keep believing, hoping, and loving. All else is just existing.

I recently headed 90 miles west with my oldest daughter’s family to spend the afternoon with a large group of friends. The folklore began 25 years ago when six families from the same church decided to spend Thanksgiving together and, to my knowledge, a core group hasn’t missed a year yet. Each time we get to go,
we pick up right where we left off and laugh like there’s no tomorrow. We have to live like that, you know. Tomorrow isn’t promised.

What is your current, ongoing reminder that life here is temporal?

I’ll tell you one of mine. The ringleader of that gregarious pack of thankful friends is battling brain cancer. Overlooking the severity of his illness would be easier without a six-inch scar on one side of his shaved head. He also happens to be hilarious enough to play the cancer card to get his way: “Hey, Beth, can you cut me a bigger piece of that cake? You know I have cancer.”

At times we’ve talked about his illness with unembarrassed sadness, but we kept it short that recent day. Too much glad chaos was occurring around us. We sat in rocking chairs on the front porch, surrounded by our adult children and watching a flurry of their little ones play tag and chase balls.

As I looked from face to familiar face, my thoughts drew loops around the past and present. A small encyclopedia of life experience tucked in my heart told me that some of those young couples had troubles and doubts. I knew most of their stories, and few escaped the scarring licks of a blazing fire growing up. My daughters didn’t escape them, and in no small part, due to their parents. But this wasn’t a time for guilt or blame. It was a time for beholding. There before me were the young and the old, the living and the dying, the surviving and the thriving. What a slice of life, I thought, and I whispered under my breath, Such is common to man.

But I was wrong. It hit me later that such is common to redeemed man. Had we been a large group of unbelievers still bound by legitimate friendship, yes, we would have comprised a fair composite of human life, but our condition in its midst would have been worlds apart.

Faith is a game changer. Know that to your bones.

That night alone in my house, a spring of tears erupted and rushed over me like a levee had broken. A sense of sadness over my friend’s illness collided with inexpressible elation and gratitude. Grief and grace rose up within me like two giant wrestlers stopping long enough to shake hands. Pain and beauty tangled in a big knot called hope.

I’m not talking about the theoretical kind of hope. I’m talking about the kind that gets you to your next anniversary when it would be easier to give up now. The kind that gets you through your long season of loneliness so you don’t jump into a disastrous marriage on lame legs. The kind that counts on a future whether or not the treatment takes. The kind that gets you through a move when you really want to stay. The kind that grants you something gained after a terrible loss. The kind that … well, you fill in the blank.

We are not just like everybody else breathing the world’s toxic air. Our flight has been hijacked by hope.
Day Three
But Also in Power

FLASH-FORWARD: For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance. 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Have you ever been in an environment where the Holy Spirit fell with such unexplainable force that He felt almost palpable? Maybe you've experienced such exhilaration in Him that your skin felt too tight for your soul. Perhaps you've known the merest whisper of the exposure the prophet Isaiah expressed when, after a full-blown revelation of God, he exclaimed, “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isa. 6:5, KJV). These moments may be rare for us, but their roots are deeply embedded in Scripture. They can be startlingly real.

Many of us are new to environments of faith, but some of us who have been around awhile could describe extraordinary times when the sense of God's invading presence was almost our undoing. It unraveled our pretense and left our cover in tatters. As we stood before a God we thought we knew, we suddenly realized that, whoever this God is, He is greater than we thought.

Mark 4 records such a moment in the lives of Christ’s disciples when He wrecked their limited notions of Him on a storm-pitched boat. Hear their minds scurrying for divine redefinition in their exclamation.

Read Mark 4:41. What question did they ask in their great fear?

Trying to wrap human language around holy exposure is like trying to cover a big-screen TV with six inches of Christmas paper. At times, the presence of the resurrected Christ penetrates the usual walls, and the One whom “no one has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16) is, for a moment, felt. The conditions can dramatically differ. No location or mood assures it. No singular messenger always carries it. No worship center, event, group, singer, or evangelist always has it. No formula suffices to get it. Nothing common about it. God’s presence can be sought, but it can’t be planned, because it’s not of man.

What on earth is it? Whatever it is, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy experienced it right there in Thessalonica. Let’s pray voraciously to encounter it on our journey along with them.

Please handwrite 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 in the back of this book.

Do you ever wish someone would risk a little subjectivity to suggest a few things that could fall within the norm for someone in Christ? I do! Call it an
overdeveloped sense of you-too-me-too, but I’m thinking many believers long to know what others experience in this gorgeous and mysterious relationship we have with an invisible God. If you’re not one of them, please pole-vault over the next few paragraphs. But if you want to stick around on some slippery ground to catch another view, anchor tight to your Bible and we’ll try not to break any bones. We can’t build doctrines out of personal experiences, but we can share what we’ve encountered firsthand if it doesn’t contradict Scripture and helps another believer.

Sometimes I feel very little in my praying, Scripture reading, or fellowshipping with believers. I’m consciously blessed, but nothing measurably reactive is going on inside. You too? That’s normal.

Sometimes physical exhaustion can make us feel spiritually dull, but that passes with some rest. During dry times we trust the God-promised values of prayer, worship, and Scripture reading, knowing they each bear fruit even when we can’t see it. God is ever-present no matter how sluggish our souls feel toward Him. However, if I remain unmoved by God and the revelation of His Word for days, I start squirming. I begin asking God to pinpoint what’s amiss.

In my week-to-week experience, the Holy Spirit dwelling within me will to some degree bear witness (Rom. 8:16; Heb. 10:15) to what I am hearing, reading in Scripture, experiencing, or praying. My inner response may not be big, but it’s discernible: maybe an assent of some kind—a nod in my heart, so to speak—toward something God seems to be saying, doing, or revealing. Maybe I’ll feel conviction or alarm or a spurt of joy or a splash of grace. Maybe my heart will leap over the exact news I wanted from His Word or will sink temporarily because I’ll realize He’s saying no to something I crave.

Do you understand from experience what I’m talking about? If so, how would you describe the way the Holy Spirit within you bears witness?

Even questions can be discernible responses to His Spirit. I often say aloud in my Bible reading, “What does this mean?” Or, “Lord, how does that work?” One of my favorite ways the Spirit identifies His work within me is by teaching me something new or shedding fresh truth on a familiar concept. Whether in my private study or in a crowded congregation, six of my favorite words are I have never seen that before! That’s sheer delight to this curious soul. The genius of God glimpsed by the human eye is slap-the-table stunning to me.

Sometimes we experience God in a corporate setting beyond what a transcription of the event could convey. Last Sunday, God moved my son-in-law Curtis with such unusual potency in his preaching that the Holy Spirit was almost electrifying. The room shifted from pin-drop silence to eruptions of applause and praise. When a message comes like that, we might feel the compulsion to cry even when nothing about the subject matter is heart-wrenching.
Have you ever wept during a sermon not out of sadness but out of the pure sense of God’s presence and power? If so, when?

That some of these moments are fixed in our memories tells us how far from routine they are. In all the dissimilarities, one common denominator prevails: God evidences Himself in such a way that many people remarkably respond. A bona fide demonstration of the Spirit occurs. It can’t be staged. It can’t be explained away. It is God alone. Acts records a time when the intercessions of a group of Christ followers for Peter and John elicited a larger dose of divine response than they sought.

What happened in Acts 4:29-31?

What if you were praying for God’s power and boldness to fall on somebody else and He also fell upon you? What if divine authority to proclaim God’s Word gushed on thousands at a gathering instead of a few?

Our fear and timidity might say, “But that was then. This is now.” Is He not the same God? Has He not said that He’d pour out His Spirit on His sons and daughters (Joel 2:28)? Must we hunker down in the cramped limits of the status quo? Or will we welcome Him to do the exceptional when He pleases, to wreck our small notions and loosen our tongues with “Who then is this who does such things?”

Back to 1 Thessalonians 1:5. How did the apostle Paul say their gospel came to the Thessalonians? In the margin list every description.

In a 1 Thessalonians 1:5 moment, let’s shift our thoughts from the listener to the communicator. You could share a message that you’ve given on numerous occasions (perhaps your own story of Christ’s saving grace), but this time, His Spirit falls on you so strongly that you can feel the power of the words yourself. It surges straight through your soul like mercury in a hot thermometer, more electrifying to you than the very first time. Wouldn’t we know it wasn’t us?

Any human messenger paying attention knows that a demonstration of God through the gospel of Christ is not her own doing. If she’s confused, God will make the reality of it hair-raisingly clear in the future. He is committed to protecting His glory even from a dearly loved, powerfully used child.

Reflecting on this beautiful phenomenon, you’ve got to love how Jesus described the way of the Holy Spirit. What does John 3:8 say about the Spirit?
Now slide your pen over to the margin and take down as many parallels as possible between the properties of wind and how the Holy Spirit might work. Think beyond the most obvious.

Carefully compare Acts 2:1-4. The “divided tongues ... of fire” (ESV) captivate so much attention that the role of the wind blows right out of view.

List every effect of the wind in this four-verse segment.

Wild, isn’t it? But in some respects, we bump the side of the same marvel in a 1 Thessalonians 1:5 moment. Something God is doing around us begins happening to us. We’re not talking about something mystical. We’re talking about something spiritual. Let’s not get so paranoid about the mystical that we shut ourselves off from the biblical. God can do what He wants. That’s the long and short of it. He never works contrary to His Word, but He gives Himself plenty of room in the white-water river flowing from Genesis to Revelation.

Circle the last two words of 1 Thessalonians 1:5. “Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (ESV).

Some commentators think the term refers to how the message was received, but most in my library aligned it with the preceding phrases in the same verse—“in word ... in power ... in the Holy Spirit”—describing how the message was given. The surrounding verses demonstrate that the listeners had a titanic response as well. Both sides got wet with the work of the Spirit when the wave of the gospel flooded Thessalonica.

I want to get wet in that wave too. Don’t you? I long to be keenly conscious of God’s power and presence when He makes Himself known. I want to sense the life in God’s oxygenated Word when someone preaches it. If we’re the messengers, we don’t want the truth to bypass our hearts on the sign-sparse highway of our tongues. We want to be shaken with the full conviction of it.

Nothing is more exhausting than trying to get people worked up over something that doesn’t work on us. Authentic anointing: there is no substitute.

“He is your praise and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome works your eyes have seen.”

DEUTERONOMY 10:21
FLASH-FORWARD: And you became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 1:6

My siblings and I often converse in the Technicolor idioms our grandmother spray-painted all over us. Because she lived with us, we had a running editorial on every subject that arose within our walls from morning till midnight. If I could bottle her sayings like vanilla extract, you'd want to pour a teaspoon of Minnie Ola flavoring into every conversational mix just to keep it frothy.

You know the type of person who keeps to herself and is so little trouble you hardly know she's there? Well, that was not my grandmother. The woman was a handful. For 11 months a year she lived with us in Arkansas, but she spent 30 days each summer in Florida with her eldest son's family. Sometimes we'd talk to her long-distance on the wall phone and insist that we missed her, because we did. Who could help it? She always responded with the same exact words: "Well, I bet it's a happy miss."

In between Bible studies, I miss the intensity of this process, and it's not a happy miss. With no hiatus, however, I'd have no life from which to write.

Scripture isn't meant to stay thumbtacked to a delicate page. God made it hardy for tossing around and testing. We're all called to “be doers of the word and not [students] only” (Jas. 1:22). As much as I miss the process, every time I get ready to launch a new journey, I take a deep breath and think, “Well, here we go again. Let the madness begin.” My desk looks like a counter at a second-hand bookstore, and I have the bedside table of an insomniac.

Please don’t leave me here alone. The more you handwrite your Scriptures, the more you’ll enter in, so write 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7 in the back of the book.

Joy in hardship is weird. “Weird,” according to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, means “of strange or extraordinary character.” People who retain delight while walking through demoralizing circumstances are not normal. They are either delusional, detached, or, in the case of the new Thessalonian believers, engulfed by the Holy Spirit. My pastor, Curtis Jones, rolled out a definition of “joy” that skidded all over the tarmac of my mind: “Joy is happiness without the moodiness.” Does Curtis's definition resonate with you?

What do you think my pastor's statement means?
If we want our “happiness” to outlast a caffeine buzz, we’re probably referring to joy. One glorious day we’ll hear Jesus say, “Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matt. 25:21, NIV) but I could use considerably less moodiness on the way. Couldn’t you? We need something with a little shelf life to it—something the buzzards aren’t circling over by noon. We need a sustainable quality that shows who we really are and to whom we belong. This side of heaven, happiness doesn’t qualify. Biblical joy does.

First Thessalonians 1:6 wipes from the face of God all the ire and angst we paint onto Him. The Thessalonians possessed “joy from the Holy Spirit.”

Do you embrace or struggle with the fact that our God is filled with joy? Why? Respond in the margin.

We think of joy as a by-product but, in John 15:11, Christ described it more like the point: “I have spoken these things to you so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” Absorb the wonder. The very joy of Christ Jesus can fill our souls right here in these flawed, afflicted bodies. His is a completing joy—a glad satisfaction that says, “He is all I was created for.”

According to 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7, the Thessalonian believers “became” what two things?
1) ____________________________________________
2) ____________________________________________

Those two “became’s” make a great pair, but the parts they play are beautifully distinct. Can you think of a tie between an “imitator” and an “example” (NIV, “model”)?

The Greek for “imitators” is mimētēs. See our word “mime” in it? Mimētēs is often translated positively in the New Testament for people intentionally patterning their lives after another.

Who exactly did the Thessalonians imitate? ________________________ and _________________________

Paul hung the safety net securely under the precarious prospect of following any mortal man. What did he say about following him in 1 Corinthians 11:1?

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy wrote to the Thessalonians long before the New Testament canon was complete. Those early converts had to study lives until
they could study letters. Centuries have passed since the conclusion of the New Testament, but many people still resist God’s Word because they are repelled by some people pushing it.

Fair or not, people tend to judge the quality of what’s being handed to them by the hand. Imitators of Christ are still crucial to spreading the gospel.

What kind of people does Hebrews 6:11-12 exhort us to imitate?

People experience the activated promises of God through much faith and perseverance. It’s never been easy. When life feels like a steep climb on sharp rocks with bare feet and no rope, we can squint up toward those who have gone before. They help us remember that this is the way of earth-etched faith.

If we decide not to opt out in fear or cave to constant self-comfort, others following below us may see how we imitate lives of great faith. They may muster the strength to reach a little higher. Now that’s a legacy worth leaving.

Grab hold of the second term to describe the Thessalonians. Fill in the blank according to 1 Thessalonians 1:7. “You became an ____________________________ to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”

The Greek word for “example” is týpos, an ancient word meaning “to strike.” The source of our word “type,” it depicts “the mark of a blow.” Not long ago, I surprised Melissa with an antique Underwood typewriter. Every old typewriter is granddaddy to your laptop and touch screen, so embrace the ancestry. A typewriter like this one pecked a perfect example of týpos on the page with every bang of a metal letter through an ink ribbon.

One of the most fascinating occurrences of the word appears in John 20:25. What did Thomas claim? Please copy it word for word.

Now circle each appearance of the word “mark.” Both are forms of the word týpos. To be an “example” is to have a visible mark left on you by an identifiable, original source. The Thessalonians were obviously “marked” by Jesus enough to give observers a glimpse of Him, but here’s the astonishing counterpart: rewind a couple of decades to a dark afternoon when the Thessalonians unknowingly left their mark on Jesus.

My mark was left on Him that day too, and so was yours, with every pounding of a nail. We have indelibly marked one another.
Many of us get out there too soon with our volume exceeding our character.

We might dig up some significance in the order of the two words “imitators” and “example.” To become an example before we’ve begun to imitate the ways of faith is hazardous. A film celebrity or sports star, for instance, might have an authentic, saving encounter with Jesus Christ. But suppose he gets thrown hastily into the Christian limelight and placed on multiple platforms as an example before he’s learned an iota about how to imitate the life of Christ.

In the margin note several repercussions of such exposure.

God alone knows the perfect moment for an imperfect person to emerge as an example of Christlikeness. Humanly speaking, many of us get out there too soon with the result that our volume exceeds our character. This was painfully true of me. But the other hazard is shrinking back because we never know if we’ve attained enough integrity to sustain long-term exposure. If we’ll walk in His shadow instead of showing off, we’ll still be a long shot from perfect, but God will get His glory.

Note an interesting twist in the two terms in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7. The word “imitators” is plural. The word “example” is singular. Isn’t that fascinating? We are each meant to imitate the steadfast walk of faith, but maybe only together do we become a reliable example. No one but Jesus can carry that much responsibility indefinitely.

Recently I pulled out an old Betty Crocker cookbook that I got for high school graduation, searching for a recipe I’d scribbled on an index card. It flipped open to a sauce-splattered page I hadn’t seen in decades. There in my 18-year-old cursive I discovered a recipe for squash pickles.

What on earth was I thinking? I cannot recall ever dreaming of canning a squash pickle. But I’ve dreamed of being a woman like my Aunt Jewell. She was the wife of Minnie Ola’s eldest son in Florida, the one Minnie Ola spent a month with every year. Aunt Jewell had some things that an 18-year-old already knew to want. I was just confused about fitting them into a jar.

My Aunt Jewell went to Jesus having loved one man for more than 50 years, raised fine, adventurous kids, and served God with a strength that didn’t boast in itself. I couldn’t have cared less about imitating Aunt Jewell’s squash pickles. It’s so clear to me all these years later: she was the recipe I wanted.

This could be the perfect wrap-up to today’s lesson: describe somebody’s recipe you want and why.
Day Five
Hear It

FLASH-FORWARD: For the Lord’s message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out. Therefore, we don’t need to say anything. 1 Thessalonians 1:8

Are we officially warmed up yet? In the in-depth Bible study groove? I’m hoping for a yes because today’s Scripture segment carries extravagant significance we don’t want to miss.

Go ahead and write 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10 in the back of the book.

After doing so, please look up the precise wording of verse 8 in either the NASB, KJV, or the ESV. According to one of those three versions, exactly what sounded out or sounded forth from them?

You’d be hard-pressed to find a phrase in the entire Old Testament that carries more weight than the “word of the Lord.” In 2 Timothy 3:16, the apostle Paul testifies that “all Scripture is inspired by God.” Within the inspired Scriptures are declarations and dictations given by God that seem to peal from the heavens with a lightening-crack of clarity through the loudest possible megaphone: “Behold, the word of the LORD came to him” (Gen. 15:4, ESV).

In virtually every formal translation, you could track down the phrase “the word of the LORD came to” significantly more than 200 times in the Old Testament. Sometimes the direct recipient of a “word of the LORD” was a priest or king, but the phrase was used far more often when God chose to speak through one of His prophets. Take Jeremiah—a prophet whose book offers the phrase a stunning 48 times in the ESV.

The exact placement of the first appearance of “the word of the LORD” is profoundly telling. You’d find it in Genesis 15:1, where it serves as the deliberately sky-heightened preamble to one of the most pivotal points in the history of God’s people. The Lord comes to Abram in a vision. Through an elaborate ceremony of sacrifices, a smoking fire pot, and a flaming torch, God cuts a covenant with Abram and his descendants and discloses the perimeters of the promised land. His word is His bond; the blood is His path.

After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great.”

GENESIS 15:1
The following verses offer a broad-spectrum view of the power of the phrase. What does each say about the “word of the LORD”?

Psalm 18:30

Psalm 33:6

Ezekiel 37:4—Let’s get specific on this one. What were the dry bones told to do?

Peruse the context. What happened as a result in verse 7?

God speaks and slings stars into orbit without lifting a finger. God speaks and the scattered bones of the dead clack and rattle back together. That’s the power of the word of the Lord and precisely our point in 1 Thessalonians 1:8. Let’s read it again with appreciation.

○ What sounded forth from the Thessalonians after their conversion?
  Write it again with the volume turned up.

The time was right. Before “In the beginning” was etched on a scroll, the moment we’re studying was already scheduled. Additionally, Amos prophesied a crucial precursor to the New Testament era in Amos 8:11-12.

What did Amos say about the word of the Lord?

The prophecy was fulfilled with four hundred years of divine silence. Who but God would think to break the haunting, hollow quiet with the cry of a baby in the “fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4, ESV)? Then “the Word became flesh and took up residence among us” (John 1:14). The reference to Jesus as the Word was explicitly intentional after the intolerable silence.

For centuries people searched high and low for the fresh speech of God. Then came the Word.

Circle that definite article.

Christ came as the perfect and the complete earthbound communication of God to man—the very embodiment of “Love divine, all loves excelling.”
After Jesus Christ completed His earthly mission, offering His sinless life on the cross and overcoming the grave, He ascended into the heavens and took His seat at the right hand of God. As promised, He then sent the Holy Spirit to infuse His disciples to spread the saving message of the gospel throughout the world. And suddenly, the phraseology “the word of the Lord” popped back onto the page with impressive frequency through the Book of Acts (see Acts 8:25; 13:44,48; 15:35,36; 19:10, ESV).

So why is that a big deal to us? Because the word of the Lord heralded by the early New Testament church was no less prophetic or divinely intentional than all its two hundred-plus preceding Old Testament occasions. Whatever you do, don’t take that lightly. Our gospel was not an afterthought but the driving culmination of all divine declaration.

According to 1 Thessalonians 1:8, exactly what did the “word of the Lord” do?

The Greek term exēcheō—translated “rang out” in the HCSB and “sounded forth” in the ESV—is derived from the Greek ēchos and makes its one-time-only appearance in the New Testament right here. In Paul’s day, the word might be used to describe a clap of thunder or the blast of a trumpet. The word emphasized reverberation like that of an echo. The term could also describe a rumor running rampant.

Keep in mind how early the visit to the Thessalonians came in the New Testament era and how this inspired letter is believed to be Paul’s first. Tremendous divine intention is in play here. Why was Thessalonica so strategic? You’ll remember it best if you see it for yourself.

Turn to the inside back cover and study your map. On that page, jot down a few descriptions of the city’s placement.

Long quotations from commentaries can get tedious, but to understand the importance of the message ringing out specifically from Thessalonica, this one earns a careful read.

Circle each place name in the following paragraph. Then glance at them all on the map inside the back cover.

The influence of the capital city of Thessalonica over the province of Macedonia was enormous ... It was a powerful metropolis with easy access to the interior and the northern frontier by means of good roads, and it lay not far from Asia and other Roman provinces by way of the sea. The Via Egnatia would take a person up to Byzantium.
Their faith had "gone forth everywhere." 

or east to the region of Illyricum and from there on to Rome across the Adriatic. The Thessalonians looked outward. These were not a rustic people who were occupied only with local concerns but a city of great influence in all spheres, not only the political and economic but also the religious. Therefore it comes as no surprise to hear that when the Thessalonians turned from their idols to the true and living God, they themselves became the ones who brought the gospel to Macedonia, Achaia, and everywhere (v. 8).¹¹

Note the four-word sentence right in the middle of the excerpt and complete this sentence accordingly:

"The Thessalonians ___________________ __________________." 

Tie those four words to your memory. They’ll pop up again in our next session.

Only one accreditation could have rivaled the word of the Lord ringing out through the Thessalonians. Amazingly, they’d earned it as well: their faith had “gone forth everywhere,” so that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy “need not say anything” (v. 8, ESV).

The Thessalonians received the messengers, then became the messengers. In the words of John Stott, we could “call it holy gossip ... the excited transmission from mouth to mouth.”¹² The gospel is the treasure that we’re never surer we’ve received than when we keep trying to give it away.

The Spirit bears witness in our churches by turning us inside out. The Thessalonians teemed with life-bearing evidence of their newborn faith.

Fill in the remainder of verse 9: “for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned ___________________ to serve the living and true God.”

Describe a situation in which you witnessed or participated in “the excited transmission” of the gospel.

According to Dr. Gene L. Green, “Atheists were a very rare breed during this era. Religion was part of the warp and woof of society.”¹³ As your perception of the Thessalonians takes shape, keep in mind that these were not “godless” people. They had more gods than they knew what to do with. They just didn’t know the one true God and His Son, Jesus Christ.
Zeus was proclaimed as the highest god. Aphrodite, the “patroness of the prostitutes,” was their female superstar (the soil of that ancient city has turned up all sorts of clay figurines bearing her image). Add other false gods like Heracles, Nike, and Apollo—whose symbols were minted into coins in Thessalonica—and you’ve got yourself one religious city.\textsuperscript{14}

We’ve all had false gods. We’ve all given place to people and things that only God can wear and bear. We also tend to keep our gods a good bit numerous so that we don’t have to steer all our worship in one direction.

We crave freedom to navigate and negotiate, but many of us arrive at a shocking revelation: spreading the love around to a host of worldly gods just adds link after link to a strangling chain of bondage. Idolatry is a python of misfit parts, squeezing the life out of us.

Fill in these two blanks:

“How you turned _______ God ________ idols” (v. 9).

Every turning \textit{to} automatically involves an inherent turning \textit{from}. That’s the nature of a turn. With our deliberate turn to God comes a deliberate turning away from our old life and our previous attempts to remedy the restlessness of our souls (2 Tim. 2:19).

As you glance into your past to your own turn to God, what was the hardest part of the old you that you had to leave behind?

Has the turn thus far been worth the trouble? Be candid in your response and explain it briefly.

In Romans 8:18 Paul wrote words we can each confidently claim: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.” Nothing we’ve left behind us can compare to what we have ahead. That, Sister, is a promise.

Dry bones? “Hear the word of the LORD!” (Ezek. 37:4).