

An Energetic Church
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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A man reportedly approached Charles Spurgeon one Sunday morning and said, *“I’ve visited many churches these past few years and all of them seem to have problems. So, I keep going from church to church looking for the perfect one, which is why I came this morning.*

Spurgeon told him, *“My church isn’t the one you’re looking for, but if you should happen to find such a church, I beg you not to join it, for you would spoil the whole thing.”*

Those words have been restated and repeated countless times. In fact, someone even translated this thought into poetic prose:

*I think that I shall never see
a church that's all it ought to be;
A church whose members never stray
beyond the straight and narrow way;
A church that has no empty pews,
whose pastor never has the blues;
Such perfect churches there may be,
but none of them are known to me.
But still, we'll work and pray and plan
to make our own the best we can.*

Since local churches are made up of sinners saved by God’s grace, no church is perfect. But I think some churches are closer than others.

The church at Thessalonica is in that category. Throughout his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul praises them for their faithful work, their loving deeds, and their commitment to Christ.

Paul even highlights, in chapter one, four qualities that made the congregation in Thessalonica a mighty church.

Even though our own church may never be perfect, I think we can certainly come close by following the example of the Thessalonians.

So, what are these marks of a mighty church?

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First, a mighty church is an energetic church. In a museum in Detroit, Michigan, there's a huge steam locomotive.

Beside this complicated piece of machinery is a sign showing boiler pressure, size and number of wheels, horsepower, lengths, weight and more.

The bottom line indicates that 96% of the power generated was used to move the locomotive and only 4% was left to pull the load. Many churches are like that; 4% of the members do about 96% of the work.

It reminds me of the little boy in Sunday School who, after hearing his dad preach on “*justification*,” “*sanctification*,” “*purification*,” and all the other “*—ations*,” was ready when his Sunday school teacher asked if anybody knew what “*procrastination*” meant.

The boy said, “*I’m not sure what it means, but I know our church believes in it!*”

Well, the church in Thessalonica didn't believe in it. They were a hardworking, energetic church.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, “*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.”

Throughout his letter, Paul praised the church in Thessalonica for their activity, their work, and their deeds. This was a church that was doing things; they were energetic.

Faith in Jesus ought to manifest in works. Our love for God and for the church ought to prompt us to labor.

The great thing is, when our labor is motivated by love, it doesn't feel like work. Jacob knew this.

In Genesis 29 there is a beautiful love story about Jacob and his beloved Rachel.

The well outside of Paddan Aram was covered with a heavy stone which took several men to move.

Normally, the shepherds in the area would gather at the well with their flocks then, together, they would lift the stone off the well to water the sheep.

One day, as Jacob relaxed by the well waiting for some strong guys to come by and help him move the stone, a beautiful shepherdess approached.

It was love at first sight. Jacob jumped to his feet and single handedly pushed the massive stone aside so Rachel could water her sheep.

Jacob spent a month mooning over Rachel and wanted desperately to marry her, but he couldn't afford an engagement ring let alone a dowry.

So, he told Rachel's father: *"I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."*

Laban agreed. And the Bible says, *"So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her."*

Isn't that beautiful? It should be the same way with church's love for the Lord. In God's church, everyone has a special job to do. We're all called to work until Christ returns.

Each of us are called to a labor of love. If you're not serving in some way, you should get to work because a Mighty Church is an energetic church.

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Secondly, a mighty church is an elect church. Paul continues describing this mighty church in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, *"For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you."*

Paul reminded the Thessalonians of their status as God's "chosen." Very few issues cause more confusion and arguments among Christians than the issue of "election;" being chosen by God.

The idea that the church is God's elect or chosen people runs all through the New Testament.

All Christians recognize this but disagree as to how God choosing us relates to us choosing Him.

Unconditional election is the belief that we chose God because He chose us. Conversely, conditional election is the belief that God chose us because we chose Him.

Each view attempts to reconcile the Sovereignty of God with the free-will of human beings. Which one is correct? Honestly, I don't know how it works. I'm only glad it does.

That God loves us and chose us to be His people ought to inspire gratitude, fill us with a sense of worth, and motivate us to be the kind of people that He's chosen us to be.

To understand the significance of being chosen by God, just think of all the times you weren't chosen.

Maybe you were an uncoordinated kid. One of those who was usually chosen last to be on a team in gym class. And then, only because there was no one left.

Maybe you were passed up for promotion or turned down for a date. You'll probably never be elected President or chosen to compete on American Idol, but you were chosen by God.

Unlike the kids in the gym, God doesn't shrug His shoulders and say, *"Well, I guess I'll have to take her if no one else will."* To be chosen by God means we are His first choice and His best choice.

But, why did God choose us? Is it our good looks? Our irresistible personality? Our unparalleled wit and wisdom? None of the above. God chose us because of His love for us.

"God loves you and has chosen you," Paul said. He chose us to be His people. Embrace your election by God and let it empower you to be the person He chose you to be. A mighty church is an elect church.

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Third, a mighty church is an evangelistic church. When Paul praised the Thessalonians for their *"faithful works and loving deeds,"* one of their works he was referring to was their love of sharing the gospel.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, *“The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it.”*

The Christians in Thessalonica were not only an energetic and elect church; they were an evangelistic church. They were constantly sharing their faith and sharing Jesus.

Today, when people hear the word evangelism, they have an immediate negative reaction. They envision hokey TV evangelists, door knocking campaigns, or sign-wielding street evangelists.

You might imagine people like Billy Graham, T.D. Jakes, or Rick Warren and think, *“That’s not for me, I just couldn’t do that.”*

Which reminds me of an old Peanuts cartoon where Lucy says to Charlie Brown, *“I would have made a great evangelist.”*

Charlie Brown answers, *“Is that so?”* She says, *“Yes! I convinced that boy in front of me at school today that my religion is better than his religion.”*

Charlie Brown asked, *“Well, how did you do that?”* Lucy answers, *“I hit him over the head with my lunch box.”*

While that’s definitely not the best approach, the truth is... there are a lot of different ways you can share your faith.

You could tell your friends about the difference God has made in your life. You could spark spiritual conversations with your relatives and co-workers. Or you could simply invite your neighbors to attend church with you.

We live in a culture where the majority of people identify themselves as Christians, but many of them are so disconnected from the church and the Bible, that they've no idea what it means to live the Christian life.

But many want to. According to a study by Barna Research, 25% of unchurched Americans say that they would likely attend church if a friend would make the effort to invite them!

Think about that... that's 1 in 4 of your friends who'd be willing to come to church and hear the Gospel if you'd just invite them.

A mighty church is an evangelistic church, because, like a fire, if a church isn't growing, it's dying.

Let's follow the example of the Thessalonians and let the message of Jesus ring out from here to everywhere.

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Finally, a mighty church is an expectant church. As Paul brings this section to a close, he reminds the Thessalonians what people are saying about them.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, *"They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead."*

The Thessalonians spent their lives with an eye on the clouds and ear for the trumpet. They waited anxiously for the day of Christ's return. Sadly, many of us have lost that sense of expectancy.

The return of Jesus is a vital part of God's redemptive plan for humanity.

History isn't an endless succession of meaningless circles, but a directed movement toward a great event: the Second Coming of Christ.

Christ's coming was foretold by prophets, proclaimed by angels, and promised by Jesus Himself. John 14:3, *"I will come again."*

The Bible declares in Hebrews 9:28, *"Christ will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting on him."*

Are you waiting eagerly for his return? I think many Christians are afraid of that question. They know what the answer should be, but in their heart of hearts they say, *"No."*

They're so caught up in their lives here on earth, that they hardly think about eternity. Not the Thessalonians.

They looked forward to Christ's return with eager anticipation. The hope of His return carried them through troublesome times and spurred them on to even more loving deeds and works of faith.

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Conclusion

We may never be the perfect church, at least, not on this side of heaven.

But I think, that by following the example of the Thessalonians, we can be an energetic church, an elect church, an evangelistic church, and expectant church. In other words, we can be a mighty church!

Next week, we'll continue looking at Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians and discover some more marks of a mighty church.

Maybe you're still looking for that perfect church. Well, as much as I love Grace Fellowship, we're not a perfect church.

But we might be a mighty church and if that's something you'd like to be a part of then I want to invite you join us.