

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

STUDY TWELVE

What a Way to Say Good-Bye!

1 Thessalonians 5:23–28

Paul takes six verses to graciously affirm his readers with a benediction that is the emotional capstone of his entire letter.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT a rich, life-giving three weeks you've shared together. Conversation. Insight. Fellowship. Laughter. Prayer. But the day has come for your son to return to college. Ticket in hand and awaiting the flight attendant's final boarding call, it's time to say good-bye.

After some last-minute small talk, you share an embrace. As tears flow, so does your farewell prayer. In it, you invite the Lord's blessing upon your child, charge him with specific instructions, and close by petitioning God for His grace upon his every move. Then, a final wave good-bye.

How we dislike saying good-bye. It's easier to say, "See ya later" or "Stay in touch" or perhaps "Bye-bye." *Good-bye* sounds so final. But, agonizing as it may be, good-bye can be an opportunity to focus our attention on the Lord and on the security that He alone supplies—for those leaving and for those remaining behind.

In the passage we'll examine in this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Paul concludes his first letter to the Thessalonians with such a farewell. Rather than closing with a breezy, "Yours truly, Paul," he poured out his good-bye with a heartfelt benediction—showering his beloved friends with affirmation, instruction, and grace.

Let's read Paul's emotional good-bye to the young church he loved so deeply and learn how to give those we love a spiritual blessing they'll always remember.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Paul's benediction at the close of 1 Thessalonians echoes the priestly blessing spoken over the nation of Israel:

*“The LORD bless you, and keep you;
The LORD cause His face to shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His face to you,
And give you peace.”* (Numbers 6:24–26 NASB)

As you approach the final Bible study in this series, prepare your heart by requesting God's favor for insight and blessing. Here's some space to write your prayer.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

From the outset of his letter, Paul continually shared his affection toward the Thessalonians. Because they were among his first converts in Europe, Paul undoubtedly felt a special kinship with them. Over and over, he expressed love toward his spiritual brothers and sisters. Paul poured out his heart in each chapter:

Chapter 1—“We always thank God for all of you” (1:2)

Chapter 2— “We loved you so much” (2:8)

Chapter 3—“When I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy” (3:5)

Chapter 4—“We encourage you” (4:1)

Chapter 5—“Brothers and sisters, we urge you” (5:14)

As he penned his good-bye, loving tears must have trickled down his face and moistened the parchment. His words were tender yet strong as he drew their hearts toward the Lord.

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Observation: A Purposeful Farewell

Observation is the first and most foundational step in Bible study.¹ Read Paul's farewell in *1 Thessalonians 5:23–28* in more than one Bible version, noticing Paul's focus on the Lord and the Lord's work (5:23–24), his instruction to his beloved church (5:25–27), and his favorite theme, *grace* (5:28).

God, Who Is Faithful—1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

Paul's benediction is a prayerful blessing. It's as if Paul, with arms raised, was praying over his beloved readers and they were receiving his words with open hands.

His benediction is *rich in theology*. He wants God to receive the glory and his readers not to forget.

Read the opening lines of Paul's benediction in 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24. In 5:23, what attribute of God do you observe? What did Paul say about God's nature and His approach toward us?

Then Paul detailed three things that God alone can accomplish within believers. First, according to 5:23a, what did Paul ask God to do for the Thessalonians?

Second, in 5:23b, what did Paul ask of God on behalf of Paul's beloved friends? What does the inclusion of spirit, soul, and body indicate?

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Third, according to 1 Thessalonians 5:23c, what is the goal of God's sanctifying and preserving work in believers? Where was Paul's focus, and what does his use of the word *blameless* indicate about our future?

According to 5:24, what reassurance did Paul provide his readers regarding these three themes: sanctification, preservation, and blamelessness? What a powerful promise!

I'm glad He is faithful when I am not. I'm glad He will bring it to pass, because I cannot. I'm glad He's got it all put together. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Friends, Who Are Loyal—1 Thessalonians 5:25–27

Shifting to instruction for his beloved friends, Paul noted three ways to enrich their relationships within the body of Christ. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:25–27.

What was Paul's first request in 5:25? Given Paul's position as an apostle, what does his petition imply about prayer?

What was Paul's next request, according to 5:26? What might be an equivalent gesture in our culture today? What is the purpose for such expressions within the church?

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Under what oath did he place the believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:27? Why do you think Paul insisted that *everyone* hear this letter?

Grace, Which Is Lasting—1 Thessalonians 5:28

Like bookends on the shelf of truth, grace opens and closes Paul’s letter (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 5:28). As you read his parting words in 1 Thessalonians 5:28, why is it fitting that he would begin and end his letter with this theological theme?

In Jesus Christ, I am complete. I have all that I will ever need: forgiveness, hope, relief, cleanliness, freedom from blame, absence of guilt. I am just waiting for Him to take me. Isn't it great to have a heart like that? He gets all the credit.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: A Theologically Robust Benediction

Paul’s benediction began with, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely” (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NASB). In Greek, *Himself* is the first word in the sentence, stressing God’s personal involvement in the blessings to follow. *Himself, God.* God, unilaterally, will bring it to pass.

Why would this grammatical construction have been important for the Thessalonians, and for us, as it relates to the promises of sanctification, preservation, and blamelessness?

Paul’s instruction to his beloved friends in [1 Thessalonians 5:25–27](#) focuses on *prayer* for himself, *fellowship* among the brothers and sisters (“Greet . . . with a sacred kiss”), and the *public reading* of Scripture.

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How does this three-fold instruction provide a model for us?

Paul began, ended, and infused his Thessalonian letter with grace. The Greek word is *charis*, and it appears 155 times in the New Testament. The nuances of the word sparkle like facets of a diamond. Review the term, *charis*, in Mounce’s Greek dictionary at billmounce.com.

Summarize your understanding of the meaning of grace. Who is the originator? Who are the recipients? How do we receive grace?

When Paul says, “Go in grace,” it means something. “Go and live in the light of this truth.” You will not hear it outside these walls. You will not get it from men and women; you will get it from God. He provides it in abundance.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Sanctified, Preserved, Blameless

The three themes mentioned in Paul’s benediction correlate with other passages in the Scriptures. Paul addressed sanctification in his letter to the Corinthian believers, who were known to struggle with spiritual compromise and moral failure. According to the prologue in *1 Corinthians 1:2*, what phrases did Paul use to address them? What verb tense did Paul employ when referencing their sanctification? What theological point was Paul making?

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Concerning God's preservation of believers, how does Jesus' high priestly prayer to God the Father in [John 17:15](#) mirror Paul's prayer?

God would not only sanctify and preserve them, but he would also present them blameless (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24). [Jude 24–25](#) echoes this promise. What else is God able to do, according to Jude 24?

We needn't fear death. One day, as we step into the Lord's presence, He will present us blameless in Christ, fully welcomed into His presence. What a future!

When you, child of God, stand before your Savior and He examines you, He sees you in Christ free of guilt, without blame! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Thessalonians as Our Guide

The short book of 1 Thessalonians is your map, your anchor, and your source of hope. It will keep you stable in any storm. It will give you joy when all around you is sadness, depression, and discouragement. It challenges you to increase your faith and to genuinely love your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Faith, love, and hope—the three theological virtues—were Paul's gifts to the fledgling Thessalonian church and to us.

What specific encouragement do you take from God's ability to sanctify, preserve, and keep you blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus? How do these promises motivate you?

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What overall message from God can you take with you from your study of 1 Thessalonians? Perhaps a message of comfort? An encouragement? A sense of direction? A reminder of truth?

As you wrap up your study, write a short prayer to the Lord, thanking Him for His marvelous, matchless, and unmerited grace toward you in your Lord Jesus!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, as I come to the end of this magnificent letter to the Thessalonians, it is as though You have written to me a love letter. You have reprovved me, exhorted me. You have encouraged me, and You have often reminded me of truth to live by, as well as grace to demonstrate. May I know, my Father, Your love for me in greater measure because of my time spent in the letter to the Thessalonians. Show me often and remind me often of the importance of living out these great truths, until Your Son returns. I ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior, my Lord. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1985, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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