

# November 2025

November 2, 2025

Text: 2 John

*“Live in Love”*

Where to begin? I am uncertain because I do not know what you have read or learned elsewhere. For example, did you know that the early church attached the name “John” as the author of this letter because it reflected so much of the spirit of that apostle? The feminine language [“elect lady” (v. 1), “elect sister” (v. 13)] was a common practice of describing the whole church that way. These three letters (1 John, 2 John, 3 John) are not necessarily to the same congregation and not necessarily from the same leader.

It will not surprise you that when the writer of this letter calls on the church to love one another, the writer uses the word *agape*. We know that *agape* is more than romantic affection; it is more than sibling friendship. It is a self-giving that does not depend on the deservedness of the one being loved.

If we are indeed to be an *agape* people, how do we deal with the instruction of this letter when it says not to receive or welcome persons who bring false teachings (v. 10)? How can that attitude be considered *agape*? That’s a tough question. Wouldn’t you rather talk about the weather? Wouldn’t you rather talk about who won last night’s football game?

It won’t go away. How is it *agape* if I do not welcome someone with whom I *agape*? I mean, even Jesus ate with sinners!

One possible understanding is that this is the exception that proves the rule. Another interpretation would be to say that by alerting the evil doers to the error of their way, we are actually doing them a favor, even *agape*. Some look at this text and argue that we must at all costs protect the truth of Christ from those who would deny it. Some students of the Bible protest that verses 10 and 11 are aimed at a particular situation in a particular church in a particular time and are not intended to be universally applied.

So, what is God revealing to us in this text? It seems to me that the bottom line is that Jesus Christ is the truth and that His truth is love. Living out that love is not always easy.

*What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *The Interior Castle* (Harper, San Francisco), Teresa of Avila wrote: “The Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our works as the love with which they are done.”

*Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord God, You have sent us Jesus to show us how to love. Come now and stay with



us as we struggle with what it means to love in our life journey...”

November 9, 2025

Text: 3 John

*“What Is Good?”*

Let me begin with a personal memory. This day would have been my son’s 64th birthday, but he died unexpectedly in 2019. So many memories! But one thing that came to mind as I read this week’s text was something my son said when he chaired the Staff-Parish Relations Committee of a United Methodist congregation in Michigan. He said, “Some folks in the congregation seem to be surprised that we hold the staff to higher standards than what is expected in secular work.” What do you think?

In 3 John, the writer contrasts Diotrephes with Demetrius. Diotrephes was living by the standards of the world. Demetrius was living by the standards of God. For the writer, it boiled down to this: “Whoever does good is from God...” (3 John 11). That’s a pretty high standard!

Did you notice that this letter writer blasts Diotrephes (3 John 10) for the very thing that the writer of 2 John tells the church to do (2 John 10)? What I learn from that is that context can shape whether something is good or not. The standard of “love” is always right, but determining what is loving varies from time to time. (For example, punching someone in the chest in a fit of anger is not good; applying that same pressure during CPR to help someone who is not breathing is a good thing.) Someone talked about the context of the New Testament. They said if “it’s not in context, it is just a con.”

Many of the epistles in the New Testament are written to congregations, probably read before a gathering of the faithful. On the other hand, 3 John is addressed to an individual, Gaius. This reminds me of the importance of leadership. If you have been asked to head up some task in your congregation, read these verses and change

that name to your name. Would there be rejoicing because of *your* faithfulness (v. 3)? Would there be celebration because of *your* for the strangers (v. 5)? Would there be a reminder of how you have offered support to the mission of the Church (v. 8)?

Something jumped out at me when I just now re-read 3 John. Notice how it closes: "Greet the friends there, each by name." It's one thing to say "I just love everybody there" and another thing to say "I love Hagar; I love Demetrius; I love Peter; I love Rebecca." I am reminded that indeed God loves *all* of us, but also God loves *each* of us. For me, it makes a difference when I insert MY name!

This letter is very practical. There is little of abstract theology in these verses but notice how the writer acknowledges the practical application of the Good News of God. He speaks of good health (v. 2). He enjoys friendly visits (v. 3). He sees other believers as members of the family (v. 4). Help for people who are traveling (v. 6). There is support, probably financial (v. 8). Simply getting together (v. 14).

Finally, after pondering how much this letter must have meant to Gaius, hearing from someone who had shared the faith journey. So, I immediately stopped and sent an email with whom I had not been in touch in several years. Why don't you do the same?

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Steve Harper (*Prayer & Devotional Life of United Methodists*, Abingdon) quotes Pope John Paul II: "It is not even thinkable that a Christian should live solely for himself."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "We're in this together, Lord..."

## **November 16, 2025**

### **Text: Jude**

#### ***"Live Faithfully"***

Now I don't know for sure, but I would not be surprised if research showed that Jude was the least read book in the Bible. (Did you have trouble finding it?) Some students of the Bible think Jude was a brother of Jesus. Is he the "Judas" referred to in Matthew 13:55? In any case, the author was one who wrote with considerable authority.

Jude is greatly upset because there are those who have sneaked into the early Christian community, but whose false teachings and moral practices contradict the values and thoughts of the faithful (v. 4). He warns his readers that God does not hesitate to punish those who do these shameful things (vv. 6-7). In v.v. 12-13, Jude gets vigorously poetic in describing these troublemakers: "waterless clouds," "autumn trees without fruit," "wild waves of the sea," "wandering stars." That's not something a Christ-follower would want on his or her resume!

Jude's advice is what we sing in this familiar Fanny Crosby hymn:

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,  
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;  
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,  
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.  
Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,  
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.*

Take a look at all the stanzas of this hymn (No. 591 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*).

There is an interesting difference in how the closing benediction gets translated (v. 24). In the King James Bible, the injunction is aimed at those who can keep *them* (others) from falling and to present them in the presence of God. In the Revised Standard Version and in the Common English Bible, the blessing is so that you may be kept from falling and so you can come into the presence of God. It is as if these more recent translators have recognized that we ourselves are those who fall short of what God has intended.

In either case (them or you), the one who can keep them or you, and I say "me," also, from falling into these wicked ways is Christ Jesus. I cannot do it on my own. If some have fallen, it is because they no longer let Jesus Christ shape their lives and decisions.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Alec Allenson, Inc.), John Wesley wrote this about Jude: "Meanwhile, watch over others, as well as yourselves, and give them such help as their various needs require... See, therefore, that while you love the sinners, ye retain the utmost abhorrence of their sins..."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Life-giving God, hear this confession that sometimes we forget that You live among us. Help us to find Your presence in such a way that we make our choices aware of Your call to holy living..."

## **November 23, 2025**

### **Text: 1 John 5:13-21**

#### ***"Pray with Confidence"***

Have you heard this one? I used to have a beautiful lamp on my desk, but someone stole it. You'd think I'd be upset, but I am de-lighted.

Okay. Have you heard this one? A priest, a pastor, and a rabbit go into a blood donation center. The nurse asks the rabbit, "What's your type?" The rabbit replied, "I think I am a Type-O."

Unfortunately for my friends, I love that kind of humor. I enjoy the play on words. But when I come to today's focal text (1 John 5:13-21), the double-meaning of words is not much fun. A mortal sin (1 John 5:16-17): Does that mean physical death or spiritual death? Is a wrongdoing (1 John 5:17) simply making a

mistake, or is it choosing to do wrong? Does eternal life (1 John 5:20) happen before, after, or during the days we are breathing?

Now you have come to the next paragraph, and you probably are thinking that I am going to explain all these mixed meanings. No, I am not. The richness of our encounter with the Scripture is that it can meet us wherever we are and with what journey we bring. God can meet me wherever I am in my journey. The writer of 1 John tells us that when he addresses his readers: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). This session is well titled: "Pray with Confidence."

1 John 5:16 is a confusing verse. After the writer says we can pray for those who commit sins that are not mortal, he says not to pray about those who commit mortal (deadly) sins. What? Is he saying that we should not pray for someone about to commit a mortal sin? No! We should not pray that an enemy commit a mortal sin! In our own sinful way, we may hope that someone we do not like will break their relationship with God by committing a death sin. No! We are not to pray that it will happen.

The writer of 1 John must have known that many of his readers would be new in the faith. In several places (2:1, 2:12, 2:14, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1, 3:18, 5:21, for example), he names his readers as "children." God loves the little children...like us!

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Kenneth Carder (*Living Our Beliefs, Discipleship*) wrote: "Discerning God's presence and guidance and living as disciples of Jesus Christ do not come naturally or easily in the modern world... The God who calls us out of bondage and into a new world does not leave us alone in the wilderness."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Help me pray, O Lord..."

**November 30, 2025**

**Text: John 1:1-18**

***"The Light Comes into the World"***

Can you believe that it is Advent already? We are on the countdown days 'til Christmas.

Usually, when we recall the Christmas story, we think of the scene at the manger in Bethlehem: a baby, shepherds, wise men, angels, and, of course, Mary and Joseph. But that is not the Christmas account we get in the Gospel according to St. John. There is no star shining over a borrowed stable. There is no gold, frankincense, or myrrh.

Some students of the Bible think that the writer of the Gospel According to John wrote after the other Gospel writers, so he knew that the story of Jesus' birth had already been told. John made his focus on what it all meant.

John's account (John 1:1-18) begins with the theological truth that the Word that became flesh was an expression of God. In fact, that Word was God! After these more or less abstract descriptions, John moves into the recorded history, telling about the one we usually call "John, the Baptist" (John 1:6-8). Then, this Gospel writer gives the summary truth: "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14), and it is that Word made flesh who makes God fully known (John 1:18).

The Gospel writer uses "light" as a descriptor of Jesus (John 1:4-9). He was light in a world of darkness. Light helps us see what is around us. Light offers a view of where we need to be going. Light overcomes the darkness that would hide truth. But keep this in mind: Light also reveals some things we might want to keep hidden! The Light of our Lord is both for our path and to make visible the sin that we commit.

Look at John 1:15. In the original Greek, the word "testified" is in the present tense: "testifies." (Or as Henry Alford translates it: "beareth witness.") I like to claim both the past tense (testified) and the present tense (testifies) as the timeless reality of the truth being announced by John, the Baptizer. It was true and it is true!

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (The Westminster Press), Wolfhart Pannenberg wrote, "'Word of God' is therefore another way of speaking of the self-revelation of God, insofar as this requires linguistic form in order to be communicable as something hidden."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "O Word of God, You came and lived among us. O Word of God, You live among us yet. O Word of God, we rejoice in Your past tense and in Your present tense..."

# December 2025

**December 7, 2025**

**Text: John 6:25-40**

***"I Am the Bread of Life"***

This week's study begins a series of lessons that reflect on various ways in which Jesus described Himself: Bread, Light, Open Gate, Shepherd, Way—Truth—Life. True Vine. Our Lord reaches out to us in so many ways!

These studies begin with the image and truth of bread.

I remember my sixth-grade Sunday School class from decades ago. We were discussing this text from John 6:35: "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life.'" One of my classmates said, "Bread? I think I'd rather have chocolate cake."

3 We roared with laughter and agreement. Miss

Dellinger smiled and then asked, "If that is all you had to eat, which one would be better for you?" Our giggles turned into understanding.

The crowds who went looking for Jesus have stomachs that were full. This is after that remarkable miracle of feeding the five thousand and Jesus must have sensed that the crowd was now looking for chocolate cake (John 6:26). He reminds them that through belief in Him we can connect with heaven and have eternal life (John 6:35-40).

I got to wondering: What are the slices of chocolate cake that we sometimes choose instead of the Bread of Life? Maybe the chocolate cake of financial success? Or the chocolate cake of praise and recognition from others? Or of comfort and ease? These are not the things that Jesus promises. In John 4:34, Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me..." And that is the Bread that He offers to us.

Many congregations have Holy Communion on the first Sunday of each month. Then, they use physical bread to convey the gift of spiritual bread. At the Table, we recall Jesus' upper room experience with the disciples when He took the Bread and the Cup and said it was His body and His blood (Luke 22:19-20). And thus, we are fed.

Jesus Christ is our nourishment for life.

Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *Journey to the Common Good* (Westminster John Knox), Walter Brueggemann has written: "It is for good reason that in the Bible 'bread' is the recurring sign of divine generosity, because it is the concrete indispensable resource for life in the world."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord Jesus. I give thanks for the sustenance You give to my journey..."

### **December 14, 2025**

**Text: John 8:12-20; 9:5**

#### ***"I Am the Light of the World"***

So, there I was, at Bennett Pointe Grill, having lunch with my grandnephew, Francis. As I munched on my favorite (Mandarin Walnut Salad with Grilled Chicken and Honey Mustard Dressing), he asked me what else I had to do today. I said, "I'm writing one of those Bible study commentaries; this one is about Jesus as the Light of the world."

The waitress refilled my glass of unsweetened iced tea as Francis punched buttons on his cell phone, obviously in search of some particular item. He found it. It was a quote from the Frankenstein story. In that account, Walton writes his sister, asking, "What may not be expected in a country of eternal light?" (In that book, this has

to do with traveling to the North Pole.)

Jesus answers that same question when He said that whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness (John 8:12). Do I sometimes close my eyes to what the Light of Jesus reveals? And the truth is that sometimes the Light of Jesus shows me things I had rather not see. For example, I am super-busy, but by the Light of Jesus, I see someone in need. For example, I am more comfortable around people like me, but by the Light of Jesus, I see folks who don't speak my language or don't have white skin or don't vote the way I do. For example, I think I have this Bible passage all figured out, but by the Light of Jesus, I see how someone else has heard and lived out this text. Truth to tell, sometimes I prefer to walk in darkness rather than by the Light of Jesus.

And then there are those times that the day is filled with darkness. A loved one has died, but the Light of Jesus brightens the moment, and I see the gates of heaven opened. There is a friend who bears the uncertainty of disease, but the Light of Jesus reaches my friend's heart, and he knows he is not alone. There is the reality that I have made a major mistake of judgment, but the Light of Jesus is bright enough for me to learn from that error... dare I say, "that sin"?

Recently, congregations that wanted to be open about their spirit of openness and welcome have been identified as "lighthouse churches." When that light is from Jesus, it is a light that does not go out. It becomes a signal that there is hope; it becomes a vision of a grace-touched community; it becomes a reminder that the hospitality of Jesus is alive and well. And, with Jesus, there is no power failure.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Leonard Sweet (*Me and We*, Abingdon) wrote: "To be a child of the light is to be re-created..."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Come, Holy Light..."

### **December 21, 2025**

**Text: John 10:7-13**

#### ***"I Am the Open Gate"***

I was on my way to go see some friends from church. I followed my GPS directions and soon was on Latta Road. I stopped at a red light and then drove across into the neighborhood where they lived. That is when I saw the gate. It blocked my access. I could not get in, blocked by a closed gate.

At the stadium, the gate is closed unless I have the right ticket. And then there was the other day when I started out on the road I usually take into town. I drove two miles and the road was blocked. Workers were busy at work, and I could not get through.

These are not strange images, are they? We all have experienced being blocked by a closed road. But Jesus calls Himself a gate (John 10:7). He is a different kind of gate because the sheep can go in and go out; the gate is open (John 10:9). Anyone can enter the sheepfold if they choose. Anyone can leave the sheepfold if they choose.

Just before our focal text for today (John 10:7-13), there is an interesting verse. Jesus has been teaching some Pharisees, and John 10:6 says, "they did not understand what he was saying to them." That happens to us, too, doesn't it? Jesus invites us to love people who are not lovable. Jesus asks us to set aside any notion that a person's value is measured in dollars and cents. Jesus instructs us to forgive someone who has harmed us. I have to admit that sometimes John 10:6 describes me: "They did not understand what he was saying." Jesus is an open gate when most gates open and close.

There is an old gospel song, "Swing Wide the Gates." One of the refrains notes that I am headed for heaven: "Swing wide the gates for I am coming home." Jesus is the gatekeeper, and the gate is open.

You remember those friends I mentioned earlier, I couldn't visit because it was a gated community, and I couldn't get in? One day, I passed that gated neighborhood of my church friends. The gate was open. I did not enter. They told me later that they missed seeing me. Jesus has opened the gate to salvation. Jesus has opened the gate to service. Jesus has opened the gate to community. Jesus has opened the gate to mission. The gate is open. Will I go in?

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Bishop Kenneth Carder (*Living Our Beliefs*, Discipleship Resources) has said: "Our identity as children of God is God's gift to us; living in the world as redeemed sons and daughters of God is our gift to God."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord Jesus, thank You for opening the gate to us..."

**December 28, 2025**

**Text: John 10:11-18**

***"I Am the Good Shepherd"***

Merry Christmas! I just looked over our notes on last week's focal text, and I see that I did not even mention that those reflections were for study just before Christmas Day. My excuse is that I was writing this in August, and it's 90 degrees today. Nevertheless, these verses about Jesus are indeed the fulfillment of the Christmas story.

Of course, the nativity scene often shows the shepherds who slipped into Bethlehem to see the Messiah the angels had described (Luke 2:8-20). What an irony! Shepherds who come to see the Good Shepherd! Shepherds who left their flock to

visit the Shepherd who never leaves His flock!

The Old Testament word that is translated shepherd (*râ'âh*) means "to tend to" or "companion." The New Testament word that is translated shepherd (*poimēn*) is sometimes rendered "pastor." What clear and great ways of describing Jesus as our shepherd!

Ezekiel 34:1-6 describes a different kind of shepherd, one who has put self first, one who has ignored the needy, one who did not look for the lost sheep. What a contrast with the Good Shepherd!

Revelation 7:9-17 depicts a vision of God's ultimate victory. The Lamb, whose blood has been shed, will be the Shepherd who guides those who gather to the water of life. Jesus, the Shepherd, is for the living and the dead!

Ezekiel 34:11-16 talks about God as a shepherd. The text says God will search for His sheep (v. 11) and rescue them (v. 12). God's sheep will then live in good ways (v. 14). Do you remember Wesleyan theological language? What Ezekiel has just described is what our theology labels prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. Prevenient Grace, the first step taken by God. Justifying Grace, where we are made right. Sanctifying Grace, we live holy lives. No wonder we celebrate the birth of Jesus as the birth of the Good Shepherd!

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *Everyday Matters* (Abingdon), L. Gregory Jones (then Dean of Duke Divinity School) quotes Dorothy Jean Weaver: "The world that Jesus Emmanuel comes to is rather the real world...of poverty, extortion, callous cruelty, unrelenting terror, and inconsolable grief. It is to this world and none other into which God comes to be with us in the person of Jesus, the defenseless child and the crucified Messiah."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin in these words from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*: "When our need for a Savior was great, you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. To our lives he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy, and love..."

# January 2026

**January 4, 2026**

**Text: John 14:1-14**

***"I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"***

When I saw this week's focal text and saw the title ("I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"), I got curious. So, I pulled my exhaustive concordance from the shelf. Using the King James Version, it is supposed to list every time

a word appears in the Bible. So, if Jesus is the Way, how many other times has that word appeared in the biblical text? How many times does the word “way” appear? I guess I was wondering: “How many ways are there?” Now, before I tell you in the next paragraph, why don’t you make a guess?

If I counted correctly (and these 88-year-old eyes do occasionally fail to read correctly!), the word “way” is used in the Scriptures 769 times! Over against that immense competition, Jesus says that He is the Way (John 14:6).

Jesus is speaking of an eternal presence in the house of God (John 14:2-3). And the Good News is that there are a lot of dwelling places in God’s house (John 14:2). Jesus is the Way to get there.

One thing I like about this week’s focal text is the way the disciples push back when they don’t understand. After Jesus speaks of a way to get to God’s house, Thomas asks, “How can we know this way?” After Jesus talks of getting to know God the Father, Philip sputters, “Show us how to do that.” These verses invite me to do more than just repeat the words of Jesus; I am invited to struggle with them—and with Jesus—until I live with them as Truth. Jesus is the Way and the Truth.

Jesus gives meaning and purpose to our living; in fact, He is Life. We who believe in Him are likely to do good works (John 14:12), not in order to gain His approval, but because such good works grow out of our relationship with Him. We don’t do good works in order to gain His friendship, but we do good works because we are already friends with Him.

These verses stir in me again the clarity of how John begins the gospel story, John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and lived among us.” Jesus is what it is like to have God in our midst.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Emil Brunner (The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith, The Westminster Press) wrote: “The Christ whom we know and recognize in faith is no other than the Lord who seeks for obedient followers... For faith is the entrance into the movement of God in Christ.”

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Holy One, as this new year begins, may it begin as a walk in Your Way, following Your Truth, and finding Your Life...”

**January 11, 2026**

**Text: John 15:1-17**

***“I Am the True Vine”***

These familiar verses in John 15:1-17 are filled with surprises and difficulties. There are lots of places where the meaning is not easy to find.

Join me on a journey to figure out some of it!

*Jesus says He is the true vine* (v. 1). Usually, when I think of a vine, I think of a weed that grows where I don’t want it. Jesus is talking about a plant that produces fruit.

*God is the vinegrower* (v. 1). Other translations say, “vineyard keeper,” “vinedresser,” “gardener,” “cultivator,” “husbandman.” No matter which version you have, it is clear that God is taking care of the plant.

*God gets rid of those who don’t believe* (v. 2). Yes! God has a plan called “free will.” If I do not accept His gift of salvation, I am free to move on without it. Some traditions teach that God elects some to be saved and some not to be saved (predestination), but our tradition says that the choice is ours and God will honor our decision.

*God trims those who do believe* (v. 2). Yes! If I do believe, I am set free to move into the world bearing the fruit of peace, bearing the fruit of justice, bearing the fruit of service. Every good fruit bears more fruit and keeps on living. My rough edges are pruned so I can stay connected to the vine for nourishment.

*I get anything for which I pray* (v. 7). Good! A new car? Extra money for the season basketball tickets? Political election? Uh, there is a proviso on this promise from God. The prayer has to be according to the Word and will of God. “...if you abide in me, and my words abide in you.”

There is more here for reflection. What about friendship with Jesus (v. 14)? Is Jesus speaking of His own death when He says there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (v. 13)? What kind of fruit will last instead of turning bad (v. 16)? How do the commands of Jesus enable us to love one another (v. 17)?

I tell you, scripture that makes me keep pondering is a special gift.

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

D. Moody Smith, Jr. (John, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries) wrote: “Although John does not here use the word ‘church’ (Greek *ekklesia*, which appears in no Gospel except Matthew) there is an obvious sense in which the vine and branches are a metaphor for Christ and the church, the Christian community.”

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Thank You, Lord, for the mysteries of Your Word, hidden, so we can continue to search and to grow...”

**January 18, 2026**

**Text: 1 Thessalonians 1**

***“Remain Steadfast and Faithful until Christ’s Return”***

Many students of the Bible think that 1 Thessalonians is the first book written for the New

Testament. Some even pinned it down as early as 51 AD. That would be about two decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus. And already these believers are looking forward to the return of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

It is interesting that this early New Testament book is already teaching about the doctrine of the Triune God in three persons. The authors greet the Thessalonians in the name of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:1) and then proclaim all that has been done by the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6). It is almost like a trinitarian doxology!

Many in the church in Thessalonica had been pagans, worshipping idols (1 Thessalonians 1:9). But check out Acts 17:1-4 and see that Paul also went to a Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica and preached in a way that converted some of the Jewish community. The folks in the Thessalonian church brought differing backgrounds to their journey with Christ.

Does your congregation reflect that kind of welcoming hospitality for differences? I got to thinking about the church that I attend. Of course, I do not know everyone's life story, but I think over the pews and I see life-long members; I see a friend who was baptized at age 50; I see other colleagues who grew up in other faith traditions; I see couples who once would not have a place at the Table because of their sexual identities; I see one fellow who is still much in a searching mode; I see a youth who comes because he was told to; I see a first-time visitor who does not seem to be comfortable following the order of service. I look around and I see a family with one member who grew up in a non-Christian community outside the United States; I see one whose native language is not English; I see a couple who escaped a Communist takeover in their native country. I see a woman who appears to be a street-wanderer looking for help...well, that is just one Sunday in looking around, you get the idea. Differences, but now sharing in the life of the Church. Look around your pews. I am thinking that God has done some remarkable assembly work there, too!

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

In *The Magnetic Music Ministry* (Abingdon), Bill Owens has written: "Reality leads us to another truth about ministry: Churches and their programs must always be open to change in order to meet the needs of those they serve. Familiarity produces comfort. Change often means we must give up something. Providing something for everyone promotes variety, interest, and acceptance."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "You love us as we are, and yet You see what we can become..."

**January 25, 2026**

**Text: 1 Thessalonians 2**

### ***"A Model for Fruitful Ministry"***

In this letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul refers to himself and the rest of his team as "apostles" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). The New Testament word is *apōstōlōs*, a word that means "delegate" or "representative." They came as representatives of Christ, on behalf of Jesus Christ.

I got curious about how languages other than English had translated *apōstōlōs*. In Spanish, it is *apóstol*. That word is usually translated "chief disciple." In French, it is *apôtre*, a word often rendered "advocate for a cause." The Russian word is *anocrophbl*, which some folks have said means "enthusiast." In German, this verse uses *apostel*; one way to translate that is "someone who is sent out." The Chinese word *shītū* is sometimes said to mean "follower" or "protégé."

Each of these translations opens up an emphasis on what an apostle is and what an apostle does. One way that encourages me is to realize that apostles of Jesus Christ have one thing in common; that one thing is Jesus Christ. That means that the ways in which we express that relationship with Christ will vary from time, and place, and person. We are gifted in different ways and express our relationships with Jesus Christ in differing ways.

Acts 17:1-9 tells of a visit Paul and Silas made to Thessalonica. It did not go very well. Some of the leaders of the town accused Paul and Silas as coming to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). They meant that as an insult and a legal charge against Paul and Silas, but I cannot help but wonder if we Christians might actually have a calling to turn the world upside down. The world's values are not the values of Jesus Christ. In a Sunday School class I attended we got into a major discussion, comparing "profit" and "prophet." The world judges by profit; the Gospel judges by prophet.

I met some values in this focal text. There is value in expressing thanks for the richness of our community relationships. There is value in letting others know how much they mean to you. There is value in renewing contacts that have nourished us. There is value in letting others know of the spiritual gifts we see in them. No wonder Paul wanted to go back to Thessalonica!

What would Paul write to your congregation?

#### *What Someone Else Has Said:*

Hans Küng has written (*The Church*, Image Books), "The apostles as the messengers, witnesses, and authorized representatives of the crucified and risen Lord, as preachers, teachers, founders and leaders of the communities, are first in the Church... The Church is founded on this apostolic witness and ministry..."

#### *Prayer:*

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "You continue to call us, O Lord..."



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

700 Waterfield Ridge Place  
Garner, NC 27529

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