

1st February 2026 – Richard Saint**Hope-shaped Life – Hope that calls us to holiness****1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**

1. The sermon defined holiness as “set apart for a specific purpose” rather than being something strange or confusing.
 - a. How does this definition compare with how you’ve previously understood holiness?
 - b. Application: How might this reframe the way you think about your everyday Christian life?
2. Paul urges the Thessalonians to live lives that please God *because* of their hope in Jesus.
 - a. Why do you think hope should naturally lead to a changed way of life?
 - b. Challenge: Where might your hope in Jesus not yet be shaping how you live?
3. Paul affirms the Thessalonians for how they are already living, but still urges them to do so “*more and more*” (v.1).
 - a. What does this tell us about growth and maturity in the Christian life?
 - b. Application: In what area of your life might God be inviting you to take a next step?
4. Sanctification was described as the lifelong process of becoming more like Jesus.
 - a. Why is it important to remember that holiness is a process and not a one-time achievement?
 - b. Challenge: Are there areas where you are discouraged because change feels slow or too hard?
5. The sermon stressed that sanctification affects every part of life, not just the obviously “spiritual” parts.
 - a. Why do you think we are tempted to keep certain areas of life separate from God?
 - b. Application: Is there an area you find harder to offer to God’s shaping work?
6. Paul focuses on sex in this particular passage not because it is the only issue where holiness applies, but because our attitude towards it can reveal whether we are willing to let God shape everything.
 - a. Why do you think this area of life is such a revealing test of holiness and self-control?
 - b. Challenge: How can we talk about holiness in this area with both truth and grace?
7. Paul contrasts “self-control” with being driven by “lustful passions.”
 - a. How does this distinction challenge the way our culture talks about freedom and fulfilment?
 - b. Application: Where might true freedom require loving boundaries?
8. The mug illustration emphasised that holiness comes from belonging, not being spotless.
 - a. How does this speak to feelings of shame, failure, or regret we may carry?
 - b. Challenge: What would it look like to trust that you still belong to God, even where you feel stained or imperfect?
9. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that God gives his Holy Spirit to enable this life of holiness.
 - a. Why is it important to remember that we are not expected to “clean ourselves up”?
 - b. Application: How can you become more open and patient with the Spirit’s work in you?
10. The sermon ended by encouraging us to remember, “*I am set apart, I belong to God.*”
 - a. How might regularly reminding yourself of this truth affect your choices, habits, or attitudes this week?
 - b. Prayerful challenge: What one area of your life will you consciously place before God, asking the Spirit to shape it?

25th January 2026 – Sarah Mallett**Hope-shaped Life – Hope that builds relationships of love****1 Thess 2:17 – 3:13 and 2 Thess 1:3-4**

1. Paul's visit to Thessalonica had been cut short by intense persecution meaning he had to escape in the middle of the night. Paul's critics had been saying to the Thessalonians that he didn't really care about them, he ran off to save himself at the first sign of trouble, and they questioned his motives for preaching to them in the first place.
 - a. In what ways is Paul trying to defend himself against these claims in these verses? How does he treat the Thessalonians?
2. How do you feel about the language Paul uses in verses 17-20? Is it the language you use about those you love? Is it a bit intense?? How can we explain it and learn from it in our own relationships?
3. Read about the “gifts” in Romans 12:6-8. Do we give equal importance to encouragement as to the other gifts? Is it a gift you want?
4. Have you heard about the difference between person praise (“you’re so great”) and process praise (“you have worked well on that”)? Have you experienced either? How important is it to praise the process rather than the person?
5. There are 5 ways (at least) in which Paul encourages the Thessalonians in these verses:
 - i. Notice how God is working in their lives/through them (1Thess 3:6)
 - ii. Tell them that you are thanking God for them (1Thess 3:9)
 - iii. Pray with them (1Thess 3:10-13)
 - iv. Acknowledge answered prayer (2Thess1:3)
 - v. Publicly affirm them (2Thess1:4)

Read the verses attached to each. How do you think the Thessalonians felt on receiving this encouragement?

6. Which of these types of encouragement do you do and which do you not do? Which would you like to try?
7. Another Biblical person associated with encouragement is Barnabas (whose name means “son of encouragement”). He is known for encouraging quietly by standing alongside people when they needed him. He is not the same as Paul, although Paul valued his encouragement. What can we learn from his example?
8. Why do we need encouragement? Why is it important in the church? How can it be part of sustaining and growing hope?
9. Who do you know who you could encourage this week? Perhaps pray for God to show you someone and how you can encourage them.

18th January 2026 – Richard Saint
Bitesize Service – Child of God: New Origin
John 1:12-13

1. When you hear the phrase “*children of God*”, what thoughts, images, or emotions come to mind?
 - a. How familiar or unfamiliar is this way of describing Christian identity for you?

Application: How might regularly thinking of yourself as a child of God change your faith?

2. John says that becoming a child of God comes to those who “*received him*” and “*believed in his name*.”
 - a. Why do you think the Bible emphasises receiving rather than earning?

Challenge: Where might you still be trying to *prove* yourself to God rather than receive from him?

3. The talk stressed that our origin as children of God is “*not of blood... nor of human decision... but of God*.”
 - a. Why is it important that our spiritual origin does not depend on biology, background, or achievement?

Application: How does this truth affect the way you view yourself—and others?

4. The illustration of awards and achievements showed how easily people are included or excluded.
 - a. Where do you see this “*earn your place*” mindset most strongly in everyday life?

Challenge: How might that mindset sometimes creep into church or Christian living?

5. In the illustration, everyone who followed Jesus received the same “*child of God*” badge.
 - a. What does this teach us about equality and belonging within God’s family?

Application: Is there anyone you struggle to see as fully equal in God’s family? Why?

6. The talk said the Bible doesn’t say we *decide* to become children of God, but that God *gives us the right* to become his children.
 - a. How does this shape your understanding of Christian identity?

Challenge: Are you more likely to define yourself by what you do, or by what God says about you?

7. It was noted that we may not immediately *feel* different when we become children of God.
 - a. Why do you think feelings can take time to catch up with spiritual reality?

Application: How can you hold onto God’s truth when your feelings don’t align with it?

8. The talk emphasised that becoming a child of God is available to anyone, regardless of background or ability.
 - a. How does this challenge common assumptions about who “*belongs*” in church?

Challenge: How welcoming is your own attitude to people who are exploring faith?

9. Following Jesus was described as starting with what God has done, not what we do for God.
 - a. Why is this distinction so important for a healthy Christian life?

Application: Where might you need to let go of performance-based faith?

10. If being a child of God begins with receiving and trusting Jesus, where are you personally in that journey right now?

Challenge:

 - If you are unsure: what might be holding you back from receiving this gift?
 - If you are already a Christian: what would it look like this week to live more confidently as God’s child?

11th January 2026 – William Hazelton
Hope-shaped Life – Commitment
1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

1. Happy New Year!!! Are you looking forward to 2026? What does hope have to say to you as you contemplate this question?
2. 1 and 2 Thessalonians are the Epistles that speak most about the End Times or the Second Coming.
 - (a) What do you think about this? Puzzled, fearful, expectant or what?
 - (b) Some of you may have been on the Bible Course. Perhaps share with the Connect Group what you learnt about this subject.
3. William used the picture of a journey:
 - (a) Jesus journeyed to earth
 - (b) If we believe we are citizens of heaven and on our way home
 - (c) God is on the move and we journey with him and to him – in our earthly lives - and in eternity – he is there.
 - How does this perspective help us as we look at the world, as we contemplate the rest of our lives and life beyond death? And how does this affect the way we view others?
4. How can we know hope in our hearts?
5. 1 Thessalonians 1.10 and 2.16 both end with “the wrath of God.” Heaven and hell. An eternal perspective.
 Now note from the passage:
 - i. the gospel – v 2 – the whole gospel – can you summarise the gospel and the call we receive and the consequences of saying Yes or No to Jesus etc – are we ready to share the gospel
 - ii. does the future seem daunting – see v 2 – help of God – share how he helps
 - iii. are you fearful – see v 2 – courage – share experiences of this
 - iv. do you feel inadequate – v 4 – approved and entrusted by God with the gospel – God equips us
 - v. do we seek to please and as we do so downplay the gospel – v 4 – what does that mean for preachers – what does this mean to all of us in our contact with those whom we meet (of our faith, other faiths or no faith)
 - vi. how can we be faithful to the gospel’s demands and loving – v 7 – gentleness – what does this look like
 - vii. is this a whole life thing – v 8 – what a challenge to us and the church
 - viii. how can we live worthy lives – v 12
 - ix. do you know your ultimate calling – v 12 – his kingdom and glory
6. Take time to pray for one another as you discuss what all this means in practical terms.
7. See Romans 15.13. What has that to say to you as a Connect Group and as an individual? So for 2026. For the rest of our lives and for life beyond death....

4th January 2026 – Richard Saint
Hope-shaped Life – an Introduction
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1. **The talk suggested that “every day has a lot to learn from Christmas.”**
 - a. What aspects of Christmas faith (hope, expectation, God’s initiative) are hardest to carry into ordinary life once the season is over?
 - b. **Challenge:** What would it look like for one of those aspects to shape your January?
2. **In verses 2–3 Paul links faith, love, and steadfast hope.**
 - a. How does biblical hope differ from optimism, wishful thinking, or positivity?
 - b. **Application:** Where might you be settling for something less than Christian hope?
3. **Paul stresses that the gospel came “not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.”**
 - a. Why is it important to remember that hope is God’s initiative rather than our achievement?
 - b. **Challenge:** Are there areas of your faith where you are relying more on effort than on God’s power?
4. **The Thessalonians received the gospel “in spite of persecution... with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit”.**
 - a. How do you usually respond when faith makes life harder rather than easier?
 - b. **Application:** What might Spirit-given joy look like in a current challenge you are facing?
5. **Paul says the Thessalonians became an example to others and that “the word of the Lord sounded forth” from them.**
 - a. What made their hope so visible and compelling?
 - b. **Challenge:** If someone observed your life for a month, what would they notice about where your hope lies?
6. **Verse 9 describes a clear turning: “You turned to God from idols.”**
 - a. What “idols” might be more subtle in our culture today—things we trust for security, identity, or meaning?
 - b. **Application:** Is there anything competing with God as your primary source of hope?
7. **The talk described syncretism as “adding taps” to the bath.**
 - a. Which extra “taps” are most tempting for you (comfort, success, control, spirituality without commitment)?
 - b. **Challenge:** What might it mean practically to turn one of those taps off?
8. **The Thessalonians both served a living God and waited for his Son from heaven (v.9–10).**
 - a. Why do you think active service and patient waiting belong together in a hope-shaped life?
 - b. **Application:** Are you more comfortable serving or waiting—and how might God be inviting balance?
9. **The Thessalonians didn’t just have hope; they became people of hope.**
 - a. What difference is there between hope as an “add-on” and hope as the foundation of identity?
 - b. **Challenge:** What would need to change for hope in Jesus to shape who you are, not just what you believe?
10. **The talk ended with the image of one tap—Jesus—filling life completely.**
 - a. What one intentional step could you take this week to centre your life more fully on Christ as your only source of hope?
 - b. **Prayer response:** Invite the group to name that step silently before God and ask for the Spirit’s help.