

## *An Expectant Church*

### **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

1 Thessalonians 1:1) Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace. 2) We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers. 3) We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4) For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5) because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. You know how we lived among you for your benefit, 6) and you yourselves became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit. 7) As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8) For the word of the Lord 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, 9) for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God 10) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

So, like the Thessalonians, you have been waiting and now you are expecting. Ten months ago you elected nine people to a Pastor Search Committee. Now, they have announced that **It's Time – and You are Ready.**

**It's Time** - This moment in time has arrived because of prayer. Early in the process and throughout the process, the PSC as a group and as individuals, have spent hundreds of hours of prayer.

**It's Time** – After dozens of meetings. Last week at their meeting, the PSC rehearsed how many meetings they've met together. I want to thank the spouses and families of these committee members. Thank you for loaning us your spouse and your parent during these months of deliberation. It won't be long now – you'll get them back.

**It's Time** – After checking references and personal background information.

**It's Time** – After interviews and discussions and negotiations.

**It's Time** – For you to consider their choice for the next pastor of First Baptist Church, Lafayette, LA. Starting Wednesday night and continuing through next weekend, they will present the man and the family they believe God has called and prepared to be your next pastor. Not only is it time, but you are ready. You are ready after a journey of transition to begin the future with a new pastoral family. Next weekend will be the most significant weekend in your future. As you begin this week looking forward with expectancy to Wednesday night, for the reveal of the PSC's choice, culminating with his preaching next Sunday, I want to challenge you with three words.

**1. It's time to Pray!** Paul prayed consistently for the first century churches, beginning with his first letter to the church at Thessalonica. Although First Thessalonians is not the first letter in the chronology of the New Testament, most historians conclude that First and Second Thessalonians are Paul's first letters written to a first century church. Writing to

the Thessalonians, Paul affirmed his constant prayer for the church – “*We ALWAYS thank God for all of you, making mention of you CONSTANTLY in our prayers.*” (2) Always and Constantly. Paul’s consistent prayers for the churches encouraged them to keep praying also.

- **You’ve been praying – don’t stop praying.** Especially this week. This is no time to relax in your praying. In the past few months you have been praying Ezra 7:10 consistently and continuously for the PSC and their process to search and settle on your next pastor. Now that the committee will reveal their choice on Wednesday and give you opportunity to meet the pastoral family this weekend, there might be a tendency to feel a great sense of relief and thank God for answering our prayers. We should feel a great sense of relief. And we should thank God for answering our prayers, for guiding and leading the PSC, and for bringing us to this exciting time in the life of First Baptist Lafayette. But could I just challenge us this morning – **DON’T STOP PRAYING.**

- **Don’t be lulled into complacency – during these next few days intensify your praying.** I’ve heard that tightrope walkers find the most hazardous part of their routine to be the last few steps. They’ve risked their lives walking across the suspended wire. They’ve performed their death-defying act. They’ve heard the audience cheering them on. A sense of relief floods over them as they can see the end of their walk. But the last few steps mark the real danger zone. Veteran tightrope walkers know that the time to stay focused and cautious are those last few steps. So, First Baptist, the journey is NOT over just because the end is in sight. It’s time to intensify your prayers.

**2. It’s time to Trust!** Paul challenged the Thessalonian Christians to trust *their work produced by faith, their labor motivated by love, and their endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* (3) As Paul challenged these Thessalonian Christians in three areas, allow me to challenge you First Baptist Christians to trust in three areas:

- **Trust the process.** I want to commend you for recognizing that this journey of pastoral transition would involve a process. You did the wise thing at the beginning of this transition – you determined to bring in an experience Interim Pastor to lead you through this journey. You’ve honored Vicki and me by giving us this privilege. You’ve been as much of a blessing to us as we trust we’ve blessed you. You’ve been so affirming and so patient. Even though many of you desired that we stay and be your next pastor and pastor’s wife, I hope you understand and respect why we could not consider that assignment. It has nothing to do with you or the opportunity that First Baptist Lafayette offers – it has everything to do with God’s will for our future and God’s will for your future.

- **Trust the Pastor Search Committee** The system most of our Southern Baptist Churches employ when the pastor position is vacated involves electing a committee of trusted people to represent you and to search on your behalf for the next pastor. You have prayed for them all of this time – Marc, Dennis, Josh, R.B., Glenn, Tom, Boone, Rita, and Monica. You’ve been trusting them to diligently fulfill their assigned task. Now, you should respect and thank them for the number of hours and meetings they’ve engaged in during these past ten months. It’s been a joy to work with them, and I can testify that they’ve spent all of these hours and meetings out of a sense of calling and responsibility. Now that you’ve trusted them, you must

- **Trust their choice of the next pastor of First Baptist Lafayette.** The timeline

they've announced is what most churches do – they have a time, usually over a weekend, to meet the candidate and his family, to ask questions, to hear him preach, and then to make a decision. Please look this way and listen carefully. I know what some of you have been thinking: “*But this is just too short of a time to get to know him. One weekend is not long enough. I still need more time.*” That’s a reasonable reaction but unrealistic expectation. The truth is: No one but the Search Committee can activate the process and spend the time searching through resumes, contacting references, activating background checks, listening to sermons, investigating past experiences, and conducting numerous interviews. If we had to wait until everyone could participate, you might never find another pastor. That’s why you selected and commissioned these nine people. You have trusted them to search on your behalf and now you must TRUST THEIR CHOICE. That’s the way the process works. You can’t have it both ways. Most churches in other denominations must receive and accept those pastors and ministers assigned to them. Most of the time, they don’t have a choice. They don’t get to select a committee to represent them. They must wait for the denominational leaders to send them their next pastor and they must accept who is assigned without any choice in the matter. But the Southern Baptist way is that each congregation autonomously determines their process, the congregation selects their Search Committee, and the congregation receives their choice. You have trusted this process. Now, it’s time to trust the choice of the Pastor Search Committee. It’s time to keep praying and keep trusting, and

**3. It’s time to Decide!** Paul admonished the Thessalonian Christians to decide: decide to follow their leaders, decide to share the Gospel, decide to be an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, decide to exercise strong faith, decide to wait expectantly for the second coming of Jesus (4-10). Likewise, next Sunday, you will gather as a congregation to decide. After meeting the candidate, hearing his heart, asking him questions, hearing him preach, the PSC will ask you to cast your vote by secret ballot. Every member will have a voice and share in the decision. As you prepare for that moment of decision, let me remind you of two important factors:

- **When you call a pastor, you are not just voting on the man.** You are expressing as a unified congregation your sense of how the Lord is leading, what God is doing in this situation. In Acts 20:28, Paul reminded the pastors in Ephesus that “*the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*” of the Lord’s flock. Churches call a pastor to be the overseer, to be the shepherd, to be the preacher, and to be the leader. Bearing that in mind, your decision this week should be, “*Lord, show us your will*” not “*let’s vote up or down on this man as our next pastor.*”

- **Make your decision with reasonable expectations.** If you want your next pastor to fail, then expect him to come here, be perfect, and have all of the answers to all of your future challenges. Folks, that is UNREASONABLE. As you make your decision next week, do so with the REASONABLE expectations that it will take him the first year just to get to know you, to contextualize this community, to settle his family, to evaluate the ministry potential of First Baptist Lafayette, and then perhaps after a year, he can know how to lead you into the future. It will take him time – be patient with him.

**Your Future is NOW!** By next Sunday afternoon, you will have determined your next page in history. I’ve heard that great pastors make great churches. But that’s not been my experience. In my experience, great churches make great pastors. I urge you to show the pastoral candidate

and his family, that they are coming to a great church, a great church that prays, trusts, and decides according to God's will and acting on genuine faith.