EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Daily Discipleship Guide
Spring 2022 | CSB

1, 2 Thessalonians

EXPLORE
UNDERSTAND

THE BIBLE
EXPLORE
APPLY

1, 2 Thessalonians
THE BEST ADVICE

If you’ve ever wondered how to fix something, you really don’t have to look very far for help. The internet is filled with videos that show how to repair or replace almost anything. Need to replace a leaky faucet? There are videos for that. Want to install a new radio in your car? Experts can show you how it’s done. Whatever your challenge, help is just a click away.

In his Letters to the Thessalonians, Paul offered plenty of solid advice for living as a follower of Christ. He talked about dealing with persecution, handling false teachers, and preparing for the return of Jesus. He reminded his readers to love one another and to live in purity. And, unlike some advice out there, the apostle’s words were totally reliable and trustworthy.

But for all of Paul’s great advice, he knew one thing was more important than anything else. None of his lessons would mean a thing outside a personal relationship with Jesus. Without Christ, the Thessalonians would simply be going through the motions spiritually. That’s because faith is not a “do it yourself” project.

All of this points to our own need for Jesus and the life He offers. We’re all broken by sin, and He is the only One who can repair that damage. He wants us to accept His gift of salvation, and that’s the best advice we could ever receive.

- Admit to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- By faith receive Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’s name I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.
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*Evangelistic Emphasis*
MEET THE WRITERS

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER

Focus. We live in a world filled with chatter and distractions. Both have been present throughout history, getting repackaged in different ways for each generation. The noise of the day is one tool that Satan uses to turn our focus away from Jesus and stunt our spiritual growth.

The believers in Thessalonica needed to focus on the truth. They faced persecution and false teachers, but thankfully these distractions had not gotten in the way of their devotion to Christ and to one another. Paul also reminded the Thessalonians that the return of Jesus should cause them to live in such a way that they would honor Him, even in persecution.

In our culture, we can easily become distracted by the noise of a lost and fallen world. We need to not allow that noise to silence us or discourage us. We serve the risen Savior who is coming back to take us home. Our lives should be a celebration of that reality, and our future should give us the confidence to stand for Jesus in this world right now.

As we study Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians, we will discover that keeping our focus on Jesus and encouraging others to do the same will help us stand ready for the return of Jesus and will equip us to point others toward Him.

In His service,

G. Dwayne McCrary

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MEMORY VERSES

Session 1:
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.
— 1 Thessalonians 1:6

Session 2:
Although we could have been a burden as Christ’s apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nurse nurtures her own children. — 1 Thessalonians 2:7

Session 3:
For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. — 1 Thessalonians 2:14a

Session 4:
And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you.
— 1 Thessalonians 3:12

Session 5:
For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness. — 1 Thessalonians 4:7

Session 6:
For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. — 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Session 7:
He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.
— Matthew 28:6

Session 8:
But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armor of faith and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation. — 1 Thessalonians 5:8

Session 9:
He who calls you is faithful; he will do it.
— 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Session 10:
In view of this, we always pray for you that our God will make you worthy of his calling, and by his power fulfill your every desire to do good and your work produced by faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified by you, and you by him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. — 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Session 11:
Therefore be alert, since you don’t know what day your Lord is coming.
— Matthew 24:42

Session 12:
In addition, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. — 2 Thessalonians 3:1

Session 13:
But as for you, brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing good.
— 2 Thessalonians 3:13
INTRODUCTION TO 1, 2 THESSALONIANS

In First and Second Thessalonians, we are introduced to a trio of missionaries—Paul and his co-workers, Timothy and Silas. Their concern for the church is evident in their encouragement of the believers in Thessalonica.

In First Thessalonians we learn that the church was experiencing persecution. Yet this did not deter the congregation from sacrificially loving one another and others. Their sacrificial love was of such impact that those outside of their region heard of it and were influenced by it. We also see the heart of a pastor in that Paul encouraged the church in the midst of the struggle. Some people had entered the fellowship and were teaching false doctrine. Paul was unwilling to sit back and allow this to happen. Instead, he accurately taught truth to strengthen the congregation in the midst of the struggle.

Second Thessalonians centers primarily on the day of the Lord and the events surrounding Christ’s return. The apostle could not allow false teaching to stand, and he reminded the church about events related to Christ’s return. Paul used this as an opportunity to encourage the church to stand firm in God’s Word. We also see a consistent theme of missionaries and church actively spreading God’s Word. Neither group would allow difficult circumstances to hinder them from faithfully living and sharing the gospel message.

Themes in 1 Thessalonians

- A church can flourish and faithfully demonstrate love in the midst of persecution.
- God’s leaders are called to faithfully share His message to His people with pure motives.
- It is God’s will for all believers to be sanctified through obediently living out His commands.
- The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night; therefore, we must be ready.

Themes in 2 Thessalonians

- God’s people will experience suffering in this world and God’s glory throughout eternity.
- The man of lawlessness will proceed the return of Christ.
- God’s people are to faithfully share the gospel and serve Him until the return of Christ.
OUTLINES

1 THESSALONIANS

I. Greeting (1:1)
II. Commendation for the Thessalonians (1:2-10)
III. Conduct in Ministry (2:1-16)
IV. Concern for the Thessalonians (2:17–3:13)
V. Call to Sanctification (4:1-12)
VI. Christ’s Second Coming (4:13–5:11)
VII. Concluding Exhortations and Blessings (5:12-28)

2 THESSALONIANS

I. Introduction (1:1-12)
II. Instruction of the Thessalonians (2:1-17)
III. Injunctions to the Thessalonians (3:1-16)
IV. Conclusion (3:17-18)

ON THE COVER

Ruins of the Roman agora (marketplace) at Thessalonica. Two-story porticoes surrounded the site, and in the lower part was an arched thoroughfare with shops on either side. (See Acts 17:5.)
USING THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

Follower. Adherent. Loyalist. Attached. Allegiant. Zealous. Disciple. Jesus’ call is the same to all people: to follow Him as a disciple. He expects more than a courteous nod. He deserves more than intellectual agreement. He calls us to be disciples—growing disciples. How do we do that?

We know that a person’s spiritual growth hinges on daily Bible engagement. Daily implies a discipline much like exercising, brushing teeth, or eating a certain number of calories EVERY day. Should we be any different when it comes to our spiritual training? The focus is the Bible, God’s Word. There is nothing wrong with knowing the thoughts of great philosophers, leaders, or theologians, but they must not replace God’s Word. Engagement implies participating in the act of reading, studying, and reflecting. Engagement is active, requiring us to do something.

Your Daily Discipleship Guide is full of tools to help you grow as a disciple. But like any tool, you have to use it to get the benefit.

• Use this resource when studying with a group. The first five pages of each session help the group leader introduce a Bible passage and move you toward acting on the truths discovered.
• Use the Daily Exploration pages to go deeper into God’s Word, building on your group’s study experience. Engage in daily Bible study, record your thoughts, reflect on the questions, and take action.
• Use the Talk It Out section at the end of each session to hold yourself and others accountable by meeting in a smaller group of same-sex individuals (an accountability group). Share with the smaller group what God has been teaching you through the group time and your personal daily Bible study.
• Use the resource every week even when you are unable to attend the group’s Bible study. Missing a group Bible study does not excuse you from being engaged daily with God through His Word. Use the Daily Discipleship Guide to move forward in your spiritual growth.

Want this resource on your phone or tablet for when you are on the go? Purchase an eBook at goExploreTheBible.com or at Lifeway.com.
Getting the most from Talk It Out

Talk It Out, found at the end of each session, supports groups of three or four people who come together weekly to encourage, share, build up, and sharpen each other. While other issues may be addressed, the Talk It Out section provides a few directed questions based on the previous group experience and daily Bible engagement suggestions to start the weekly conversation.

These groups are made up of three to four people...

- Participants should be of the same gender.
- These groups should be smaller on purpose.
- These groups can meet at almost any location.
- These groups can easily accommodate each other’s schedules.

...Who meet weekly...

- Life happens weekly, so meeting weekly is important.
- There is nothing like sitting across from friends over coffee, a meal, or dessert.
- In some cases, your smaller group may need to meet using technology that allows for video conferencing.
- You may find it best to meet face-to-face every other week or once a month and use virtual tools the other weeks.

...To hold each other accountable and encourage each other in their spiritual growth.

- Review the questions in Talk It Out.
- You may focus on one question more than others.
- Include time to pray for each other.
Commended

Transformed lives impact others for the sake of the gospel.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10
Who has influenced you the most in your life? Who are you working to mentor today?

Each year, televised awards shows honor the work of actors and musicians. Each winner gets a few minutes to thank people for helping them get to that stage and hold that trophy. The truth is, none of us has experienced any degree of success on our own. We all have people who have pointed us in the right direction. And just as important, we have returned the favor. Each of us provides an example for others to follow. For better or worse, we all influence someone.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica began during his second missionary journey. Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, had been called by God in a vision to take the gospel into modern-day Europe for the first time (Acts 16:6-10). While their mission started in Philippi, violence and persecution eventually moved them to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1).

Their work in the city of Thessalonica was disrupted when devout Jews began stirring up trouble (Acts 17:5-9). Paul eventually escaped the city at night and made his way to Berea and Athens (Acts 17:10-34). Even though his time in Thessalonica was short, he apparently was able to establish a core group of believers who became the Thessalonian church.

Paul and his companions spent three Sabbaths teaching in the synagogue of Thessalonica (Acts 17:2). While they were able to establish a Christian congregation in the city, they had little time to take them deeper into the faith. As a result, these young converts had questions about the Christian life, and they needed instruction and discipleship. The apostle composed this letter to praise their growth and to address some of their primary concerns.

Paul likely wrote 1 Thessalonians during his stay in Corinth (Acts 18). It is impossible to know the precise timing between his departure from Thessalonica and his letter, but if Paul came to the city around 50-51 AD, the letter was likely written within a year or two of that date. This would make 1 Thessalonians one of Paul’s earliest letters, likely second only to his letter to the Galatians.

In general, Paul’s tone in 1 Thessalonians was positive. As opponents consistently persecuted the church, his encouragement and affirmation helped them stay strong in their faith. This letter also provided guidance for Christian living so the Thessalonians could continue their path of spiritual maturity.
1 THESALONIANS

1:1-10

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy A: To the church B 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 C, 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 D. 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.

Passage Outline

Partnership (1 Thess. 1:1)
Evidence (1 Thess. 1:2-5a)
Influence (1 Thess. 1:5b-8)
Purpose (1 Thess. 1:9-10)

Key Words

A. Silvanus (or Silas) and Timothy were with Paul at Corinth when this letter was written (Acts 18:5). They assisted Paul in developing the Thessalonian church (Acts 16:1-3; 17:14)
B. The church isn’t a physical building but a group of believers who meet to transform their lives. Christians met for worship in one another’s homes.
C. They were “chosen” that they might bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14).
D. Macedonia was a Roman province that Paul visited several times (Acts 16:9; 18:5; 19:21; 20:1,3; 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5; Phil. 4:15; 1 Thess 4:10). Achaia generally referred to the entire Greek peninsula located south of Thessalonica.
Paul began this letter by identifying himself as the primary writer. However, he also included Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, since they had helped plant the church. Paul regularly used the first-person plural “we” throughout the book to emphasize the agreement among the three men.

Why might it have been important for Paul to emphasize the partnership between him and Silas and Timothy when writing this letter?

Verse 2 indicates the powerful prayer lives of Paul and his coworkers. They were making mention of the congregation constantly in their prayers. Left to ourselves, we will want to take credit for the impact made through us by God; we think it actually has something to do with us. Paul and his coworkers didn’t fall into this trap. The kind of prayer life evidenced by Paul and his friends can only occur when the ones praying have been personally transformed by the gospel.

To what evidence might a person point as proof of salvation?

KEY DOCTRINE: God’s Purpose of Grace. Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. (See Rom. 11:5-7.)

A life transformed by Christ will influence others. Paul again serves as the example. Verse 5 indicates that Paul, Silas, and Timothy lived among those with whom they came to share the gospel. Living among those they were sharing the gospel with allowed the people to see them in the good times as well as the difficult times.

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to understand the context for this passage. Review Acts 16–18. Focus on Paul’s motivation for entering Greece and examine the different experiences he had in each city on his journey. What key actions and events stick out from Paul’s time in Thessalonica? How might those experiences impact his feelings toward the believers in Thessalonica?

How far does your influence for the gospel reach? How can you expand that influence?

We find a twofold purpose in verses 9 and 10. First, the church had turned to God and away from idols. Turned is a verb, thus showing an action, and this action was a personal choice. The church had chosen to turn from idols and to serve the living and true God. The second purpose we find is an active waiting. A proper understanding of the word wait shows one who is willing to stay or remain in the present state. These believers were willing to remain in a state of worship even in the midst of severe persecution. They knew that it was worth it, and they would not allow temporary discomfort to dissuade them from a much higher call.

How does the resurrection of Jesus give a person hope and purpose?
APPLY THE TEXT

• Kingdom work involves believers working in partnership.
• The gospel produces evidence of its power.
• As believers seek to imitate Christ, they influence others to do the same.
• The resurrection of Jesus gives believers hope and a future.

Identify as a group ways of fostering partnerships to expand your influence for Christ within the community. What steps need to be taken to foster these partnerships?

List ways the gospel has changed your life. Thank God for the changes listed and ask Him to show you other areas that you need to allow Him to change.

Who are you influencing for the cause of Christ? How are you influencing them? What needs to change in your life to increase your influence for Christ?

Prayer Requests


DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Christians should work together to advance the gospel.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1, considering the effect of the partnership between Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy.

First Thessalonians 1:1 indicates that the audience was the church in Thessalonica. This city was a metropolitan area located on a major seaport. It had an east-west Roman road passing through town. Given these facts, if the church was equipped in sound doctrine, the truth of the gospel would be able to flourish through the ministry of this church. From the beginning, Paul and his coworkers wanted their audience to know they were not there to represent themselves or to serve any cause outside of the gospel of Christ. Their only agenda was to equip the saints in sound doctrine so that they would be able to refute the false teaching that was prevalent in that particular area. Finally, we see that they came to offer grace and peace to the readers of the letter. Grace can be easily defined as God’s unconditional love. Peace of mind and heart is what we receive when we accept the unconditional love that God offers in and through a relationship with Jesus.

What partnerships help you and your church advance God’s kingdom?

Day 2: Walking with God leads to transformation.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5a, underlining verse 3.

Evidence of gospel transformation is found within the Thessalonian church itself. According to verse 3, the church was laboring out of love. The word translated labor means to work to the point of exhaustion. They were doing more than the minimum; they were giving everything they had and then striving to give more. We see further evidence of transformation in the fact that the church was willing to endure because of their hope in Christ. Whatever the church was facing in that particular moment, they were enduring for the sake of the gospel. Finally, we see that they were maintaining hope in Jesus and not their own actions. Hope can be defined as a desire for something beyond the immediate. The church at Thessalonica did desire something beyond the immediate, and the object of that desire was Jesus. If our hope is in Christ alone, we know we are actively being transformed as we walk with Him. The church knew God’s Spirit was working in and through them because He was actively and powerfully changing them individually and collectively as a church. Even when persecuted, the Thessalonians had no reason to doubt that God was with them and would empower them. Paul’s own life demonstrated his firm conviction despite consistent suffering.

To what evidence in your own life, might you point as proof of salvation?
Day 3: **Christians can endure persecution through faith.**

*Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5b-6, contemplating persecution that believers face today.*

Paul, Silas, and Timothy faced persecution during their initial visit to Thessalonica and understood the pressure being faced by these believers. According to verse 6, the persecution was severe. Acts 17:5-10 gives an account of what was taking place. Jews in the region had become aware of Paul’s proclamation of Christ. They were threatened by his message and began to attack those within the city who welcomed Paul and his coworkers. Influence also is found in the fact that the church endured the persecution and *became imitators* of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Paul and company knew the risk of proclaiming Christ, but that did not stop them from doing so. The church understood how to endure because the model had been set before them.

*How does knowing others have and are enduring persecution encourage you?*

Day 4: **Persecution can be used to influence others.**

*Read 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8, noticing how the Thessalonians’ example influenced others.*

The Thessalonians *became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia.* The flesh naturally would want to get out of persecution as quickly as possible. The Lord, however, can use persecution to make us more like Him and to influence others. The influence of the Thessalonians was so significant that the gospel message rang out from among them well beyond the immediate region. The phrase *rang out* points to the blasting of a trumpet or to proclaiming with vigor. It is important to note that it was the word of the Lord that was proclaimed. Yes, severe persecution was taking place, but the persecution was not silencing the message. Instead, the gospel was being shouted through the lives of those enduring the struggle.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Macedonia was a Roman province in the northernmost part of ancient Greece (Acts 16:9-10). Thessalonica was its largest city and capital of the province. Achaia was a Roman province in the southern half of ancient Greece. The major cities of Achaia included Athens (Acts 17:16-33) and Corinth (Acts 18:27-28).

*How far does your influence for the gospel reach? How can you expand that influence?*
Day 5: Jesus offers purpose to Christians facing persecution.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, noting the reward for endurance.

Why? This is one of our favorite questions to ask. God, why are you allowing me to go through this struggle? Why did this have to happen to me at this time? The list of why questions can seem endless. All too often, however, we are at the center of the why questions. When this is the case, we tend to miss the bigger purpose of living for and spreading the gospel message. The group of believers at Thessalonica didn’t miss the greater purpose. If they had turned inward and focused on either temporary or secondary matters, they would have missed the greater purpose of their struggles. When we serve with a long-term purpose in mind, the temporary is less likely to distract us. Their circumstances were less than ideal, but this body of believers knew Jesus was their Rescuer.

How does the resurrection of Jesus give you hope and purpose?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 1 Thessalonians 1, sharing with the other members of your Bible study group.

How do godly models help shape our faith?

What does it mean to actively wait for Christ’s return?

How is our church similar to and different from that of the Thessalonians? What role are you willing to play to make an impact for the sake of the gospel?