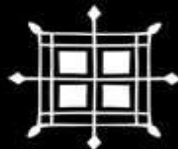


Accessible Thought,
Reliable Teaching



The Wiersbe BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Living in Light
of Christ's
Return

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Accessible Thought,
Reliable Teaching



The Wiersbe

BIBLE STUDY SERIES

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Living in Light
of Christ's
Return



The
Wiersbe
BIBLE STUDY SERIES

I & 2 THESSALONIANS

Living in Light
of Christ's
Return

David©Cook®
transforming lives together

Contents



[Introduction to 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#)

[How to Use This Study](#)

[Lesson 1](#)

[The Church \(1 THESSALONIANS 1\)](#)

[Lesson 2](#)

[Growing Up \(1 THESSALONIANS 2\)](#)

[Lesson 3](#)

[Standing Strong \(1 THESSALONIANS 3\)](#)

[Lesson 4](#)

[Faith and Hope \(1 THESSALONIANS 4\)](#)

[Lesson 5](#)

[Sleepwalking \(1 THESSALONIANS 5\)](#)

[Lesson 6](#)

[The Wicked \(2 THESSALONIANS 1\)](#)

[Lesson 7](#)

[In God's Time \(2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12\)](#)

[Lesson 8](#)

[Truth \(2 THESSALONIANS 2:13—3:18\)](#)

[Bonus Lesson: Summary and Review](#)

[Extras](#)

Introduction to 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Real People

Two of Paul's earliest letters are 1 and 2 Thessalonians. (It is possible that Galatians was written first.) These two letters were written to real people who were experiencing real problems in a world that was not friendly to their Christian faith. You and I can easily identify with these people, because we live in a similar world and face many of the same problems. Once you understand the background, the burden, and the blessing of these two letters, you will see how up-to-date and practical they are.

Counsel from a Father

The two major themes in 1 and 2 Thessalonians are dear to my heart: the return of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the local church. First Thessalonians is a letter from a spiritual father to his children. Paul pictured the church as a family (the word *brethren* or *brother* is used nineteen times in the first letter and nine times in the second), and he reminded the Thessalonians of what God did for them through his ministry. The second letter was written to correct certain wrong ideas—and wrong practices—relating to the doctrine of the Lord's return.

In these two letters, Paul balances the prophetic and the practical. He insists that the doctrine of the return of

Jesus Christ be more than a doctrine—that it be a dynamic in our lives and in the ministry of our churches.

—*Warren W. Wiersbe*

How to Use This Study

This study is designed for both individual and small-group use. We've divided it into eight lessons—each references one or more chapters in Warren W. Wiersbe's commentary *Be Ready* (second edition, David C Cook, 2010). While reading *Be Ready* is not a prerequisite for going through this study, the additional insights and background Wiersbe offers can greatly enhance your study experience.

The **Getting Started** questions at the beginning of each lesson offer you an opportunity to record your first thoughts and reactions to the study text. This is an important step in the study process as those “first impressions” often include clues about what it is your heart is longing to discover.

The bulk of the study is found in the **Going Deeper** questions. These dive into the Bible text and, along with helpful excerpts from Wiersbe's commentary, help you examine not only the original context and meaning of the verses but also modern application.

Looking Inward narrows the focus down to your personal story. These intimate questions can be a bit uncomfortable at times, but don't shy away from honesty here. This is where you are asked to stand before the mirror of God's Word and look closely at what you see. It's the place to take a good look at yourself in light of the lesson and search for ways in which you can grow in faith.

Going Forward is the place where you can commit to paper those things you want or need to do in order to better live out the discoveries you made in the Looking Inward section. Don't skip or skim through this. Take the time to really consider what practical steps you might take to move closer to Christ. Then share your thoughts with a trusted friend who can act as an encourager and accountability partner.

Finally, there is a brief **Seeking Help** section to close the lesson. This is a reminder for you to invite God into your spiritual-growth process. If you choose to write out a prayer in this section, come back to it as you work through the lesson and continue to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance as you discover God's will for your life.

Tips for Small Groups

A small group is a dynamic thing. One week it might seem like a group of close-knit friends. The next it might seem more like a group of uncomfortable strangers. A small-group leader's role is to read these subtle changes and adjust the tone of the discussion accordingly.

Small groups need to be safe places for people to talk openly. It is through shared wrestling with difficult life issues that some of the greatest personal growth is discovered. But in order for the group to feel safe, participants need to know it's okay *not* to share sometimes. Always invite honest disclosure, but never force someone to speak if he or she isn't comfortable doing so. (A savvy leader will follow up later with a group member who isn't

comfortable sharing in a group setting to see if a one-on-one discussion is more appropriate.)

Have volunteers take turns reading excerpts from Scripture or from the commentary. The more each person is involved even in the mundane tasks, the more they'll feel comfortable opening up in more meaningful ways.

The leader should watch the clock and keep the discussion moving. Sometimes there may be more Going Deeper questions than your group can cover in your available time. If you've had a fruitful discussion, it's okay to move on without finishing everything. And if you think the group is getting bogged down on a question or has taken off on a tangent, you can simply say, "Let's go on to question 5." Be sure to save at least ten to fifteen minutes for the Going Forward questions.

Finally, soak your group meetings in prayer—before you begin, during as needed, and always at the end of your time together.

The Church

(1 THESSALONIANS 1)

Before you begin ...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Read 1 Thessalonians 1. This lesson references chapters 1 and 2, “A Church Is Born” and “What Every Church Should Be,” in Be Ready. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Paul did not write these letters to stir up a debate. His desire was that these letters bless our lives and our churches. The doctrine of the Lord’s return is not a toy to play with or a weapon to fight with, but a tool to build with. Believers may disagree on some of the fine points of Bible prophecy, but we all

believe that Jesus Christ is coming again to reward believers and judge the lost. And we must all live in the light of His coming.

Your study of these letters should give you assurance for the future, encouragement in witnessing and walking with the Lord, comfort in the loss of Christian loved ones, and stability in a world that is very unsure of itself.

—*Be Ready*, pages 26-27

1. Why is the subject of Jesus' return so divisive? How can it become a point of contention in a church community? What role does it play in the definition of various church denominations? How can the topic bring believers closer together?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 1 Thessalonians 1 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

No doubt you have heard some preacher say, “If you ever find the perfect church, *please don’t join it*. If you do, it won’t be perfect anymore!”

Since local churches are made up of human beings, saved by God’s grace, no church is perfect. But some churches are closer to the New Testament ideal than others. The church at Thessalonica was in that category.

—*Be Ready*, page 31

3. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13; 3:9. What is Paul’s message in these verses? What does it look like today for a pastor to be thankful for a church? What are some reasons to be thankful? How does that thankfulness translate into a stronger church?

From the Commentary

The word *church* in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 means “a called-out people.” Whenever you read about a call in the Bible, it indicates divine election—God is calling out a people from this world (Acts 15:13-18). Seven times in John 17, our Lord referred to

believers as those whom the Father gave to Him out of the world (John 17:2, 6, 9, 11–12, 24). Paul stated that he knew the Thessalonians had been chosen by God (1 Thess. 1:4).

The doctrine of divine election confuses some people and frightens others, yet neither response is justified. A seminary professor once told me, “Try to explain election, and you may lose your mind. But explain it away—and you may lose your soul!”

We will never understand the total concept of election this side of heaven. But we should not ignore this important doctrine that is taught throughout the Bible.

—*Be Ready*, pages 31–32

4. What does it mean, in practical terms, to be a “called-out people”? Why is the doctrine of election a sticking point for many people? What does it suggest about God? About our relationship with God? Why is it important to address this issue?

From Today's World

Today's church is more diverse than ever. While Paul certainly had experience working with both “good”

churches like the one in Thessalonica and “bad” churches (see most of his other epistles), they still all had the benefit of being formed not long after Jesus Himself had walked the earth. The disciples who were responsible for spreading the gospel message in the early days did so with verve and passion born of firsthand or secondhand experiences with Jesus. Today many churchgoers treat the gospel as old news, and long-held doctrines—including the virgin birth and Jesus’ resurrection—have been questioned by some churches. Many people are confused about what makes a church “good.” Some say a thriving community is evidence of a good church. Others argue that the size of the church has little to do with its effectiveness and faithfulness to the gospel.

5. What makes a church “good” or “bad” today? Who decides whether a church is serving the ultimate good or is self-serving? What kinds of letters might Paul write to the churches in your community today? What concerns would he have? What praise?

From the Commentary

A local church must be composed of elect people, those who have been saved by the grace of God. One problem today is the presence, in the church family,

of unbelievers whose names may be on the church roll but not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Every church member should examine his heart to determine whether he has truly been born again and belongs to God's elect.

—*Be Ready*, page 34

6. How does a church determine if someone is a “rightful member”? What should membership signify? Is being one of the “elect” nonnegotiable when it comes to church membership? What are the dangers of focusing too much on membership over serving and teaching?

From the Commentary

From the very inception of this church, Paul looked to them with joy and gratitude as Christians worthy of the name. They were examples in several areas of their lives. **They received the Word (v. 5).** The gospel came to them through the ministry of Paul and his associates. Many traveling preachers and philosophers in that day were only interested in making money from ignorant people. But the Holy Spirit used the Word in great power, and the Thessalonians responded by receiving both the

message and the messengers. In spite of the persecution in Philippi, Paul and Silas had been “bold ... to speak ... the gospel” (1 Thess. 2:2), and the people believed and were saved. They never lost that eagerness for the Word of God (v. 13).

They followed their spiritual leaders (v. 6a). The word *followers* is actually “imitators.” These new believers not only accepted the message and the messengers, but they also imitated their lives. This led to severe persecution. It is important that young Christians respect spiritual leadership and learn from mature believers. Just as a newborn baby needs a family, so a newborn Christian needs the local church and the leaders there. “Obey them that have the [spiritual] rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls” (Heb. 13:17). It is not enough for us as mature believers to *win* souls; we must also *watch* for souls and encourage new Christians to obey God’s Word.

They suffered for Christ (v. 6b). In turning from idols to serve God, these believers angered their friends and relatives, and this led to persecution. No doubt some of them lost their jobs because of their new faith. Just as the Jewish unbelievers persecuted the believers in Judea, so the Gentile unbelievers persecuted the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess. 2:14–16).

7. Review 1 Thessalonians 1:5–7. What kinds of persecution did the church face? Why is faith always tested? What does that testing bring? What are some of the ways today's church is persecuted? How can we grow stronger in response to that persecution?

From the Commentary

Their “work of faith and labor of love” expressed itself in their sharing of the gospel with others. They were both “receivers” (the Word came to them, 1 Thess. 1:5) and “transmitters” (the Word went out from them, v. 8). Each believer and each local church must receive and transmit God's Word.

The verb “sounded out” actually means “to sound as a trumpet.” But the Thessalonians were not “tooting their own horns” as did the Pharisees (Matt. 6:1–4). They were trumpeting forth the good news of salvation, and their message had a clear and certain sound to it (1 Cor. 14:8). Wherever Paul went, the people told him about the faith of the Thessalonian believers.

It is the responsibility and privilege of each local church to share the message of salvation with the lost world. At the end of each of the four gospels and at the beginning of the book of Acts, there are commissions for the churches to obey (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:46–49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

—*Be Ready*, page 36

8. How does today's church compare with the church in Thessalonica as a whole? How does your local church compare? What are some of the things yesterday's congregation did that today's doesn't? Is it reasonable and wise to seek to be more like the early church? Why or why not? What contemporary concerns and culture issues make it difficult for today's church to look like the church in Paul's day?

More to Consider: A recent survey of church growth indicated that 70 to 80 percent of a church's growth is the result of friends witnessing to friends and relatives to relatives. While visitation evangelism and other methods of outreach help, the personal contact brings the harvest. If this is true, what role does election play

in the conversion process? In what ways does election involve human responsibility? What can we learn about election from the way God chose Israel and made it an elect nation? What role did God give the nation Israel after its election?

From the Commentary

Their *work of faith* made them an elect people, for they turned to God from their idols and trusted Jesus Christ. Their *labor of love* made them an exemplary and enthusiastic people as they lived the Word of God and shared the gospel. Their *patience of hope* made them an expectant people, looking for their Savior's return.

In these verses, Paul related the second coming of Christ to their salvation. Because they had trusted Christ, they looked for His return with joyful expectancy and knew that they would be delivered "from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10). Paul repeated this truth in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, and he amplified it again in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

—*Be Ready*, pages 37-38

9. Review 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. What is the ultimate result of worshipping idols? Where is hope for those who worship idols? What kind of hope did the Thessalonians find when they trusted "the living God"? (See 1 Pet. 1:2-3.)

From the Commentary

The word translated “wait” in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 means “to await someone with patience and confidence, expectantly.” Waiting involves activity and endurance. Some of the Thessalonian believers quit their work and became idle busybodies, arguing that the Lord was coming soon. But if we really believe the Lord is coming, we will prove our faith by keeping busy and obeying His Word. Our Lord’s parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27) teaches that we must “occupy” (be busy; in this case, invest the money) till He returns.

Christians are waiting for Jesus Christ, and He may return at any time. We are not waiting for any “signs”; we are waiting for the Savior. We are waiting for the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23-25) and the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5). When Jesus Christ returns we shall receive new bodies (Phil. 3:20-21), and we shall be like Him (1 John 3:1-2). He will take us to the home He has prepared (John 14:1-6), and He will reward us for the service we have given in His name (Rom. 14:10-12). A local church that truly lives in the expectation of seeing Jesus Christ at any time will be a vibrant and victorious group of people.

—*Be Ready*, pages 38-39

10. Why might some of the church members have been tempted to stop working in anticipation of Jesus' return? What's the difference between being anxious about Jesus' return and living expectantly?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 1 Thessalonians 1. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. What does it mean to you to be called "elect"? How does that affect the way you relate to other believers? To nonbelievers? How would you answer someone who asked, "Why are you chosen, and others are not?"

12. In what ways have you turned from idols to serve the living God? What idols do you find most tempting? What idols would other people like you to worship? What price, if any, do you pay for saying no to the idols around you?

13. What are some ways you are living expectantly? Do you ever become frustrated with Jesus' timing? What prompts those moments? How can waiting actually help your faith grow? What are some of the things that make waiting for Jesus' return difficult?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to say no to some idol? Be specific. Go back through 1 Thessalonians 1 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: This week, take some time to learn about your church's history. Where did it begin? How did it grow? What were its greatest challenges? How did it overcome them? Once you've learned all you can about your church, spend time in prayer, asking God to show you the role you're to play in the current (and future) chapters of its story. And take a moment to track down some of the early church founders or members, and send them a note of thanks and encouragement. A church is built of people, by people. Celebrate that this week.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

-

Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.

-

During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.

-

Before you start the next lesson, read 1 Thessalonians 2. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapters 3 and 4, "Helping the Baby Grow Up" and "Growing Pains," in Be Ready.

Growing Up

(1 THESSALONIANS 2)

Before you begin ...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Read 1 Thessalonians 2. This lesson references chapters 3 and 4 in Be Ready. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians introduced us to Paul the evangelist. This chapter introduces us to Paul the pastor, for it explains how the great apostle cared for the new believers in the churches he founded. Paul considered “the care of all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28) a greater burden than all

the sufferings and difficulties he experienced in his ministry (2 Cor. 11:23ff.).

Just as God uses people to bring the gospel to the lost, so He uses people to nurture the babes in Christ and help lead them to maturity. The church at Thessalonica was born through the faithful *preaching* of the apostle and his helpers, and the church was nurtured through the faithful *pastoring* that Paul and his friends gave to the infant church. This helped them stand strong in the midst of persecution.

—*Be Ready*, page 43

1. Why is it important for Paul to remind the church of how he's ministered to the young churches? What does this suggest about the church in Thessalonica? What is a "young" church today? How are a young church's needs different from the needs of a more established church? Is your church young or old? Explain.

More to Consider: Paul had been "entrusted with the gospel" (1 Thess. 2:4). In what ways was Paul a steward of God's message? What is the responsibility of a steward? (See the story of Joseph in the household of

Potiphar in Gen. 39:1-6.) What does Luke 16:1-2 tell us about God's expectations of a steward? How are we stewards of God's message today?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 1 Thessalonians 2 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Paul did not use guile or trickery to win converts. The word translated "guile" carries the idea of "baiting a hook." In other words, Paul did not trap people into being saved the way a clever salesman traps people into buying his product. Spiritual witnessing and "Christian salesmanship" are different. Salvation does not lie at the end of a clever argument or a subtle presentation. It is the result of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 1:5).

Often we hear, "I don't care what your method is, just so long as your message is right." But some

methods are unworthy of the gospel. They are cheap, whereas the gospel is a costly message that required the death of God's only Son. They are worldly and man centered, whereas the gospel is a divine message centered in God's glory.

Paul's enemies in Thessalonica accused him of being a cheap peddler of this new message. They said that his only motive was to make money. In describing himself as a faithful steward, Paul answered these critics, *and Paul's readers knew that he told the truth*. (Trace that phrase "as ye know" in 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:1, 5, 11; 3:3-4; 4:2; 5:2.) Paul appealed to the witness of God (1 Thess. 2:5) and to their own witness. He had "a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

—*Be Ready*, pages 45-46

3. Paul abhorred flattery (1 Thess. 2:5). What's wrong with flattery? How is this like the way David felt about flattery (see Ps. 12:2)? In what ways is a flatterer someone who manipulates rather than communicates?

From the Commentary

The emphasis of the steward is *faithfulness*; the emphasis of the mother is *gentleness*. As an apostle, Paul was a man of authority, but he always used his authority in love. The babes in Christ sensed his tender loving care as he nurtured them. He was indeed like a loving mother who cared for her children.

It takes time and energy to care for children. Paul did not turn his converts over to babysitters; he made sacrifices and cared for them himself. He did not tell them to “read a book” as a substitute for his own personal ministry (though good Christian literature can help young believers to grow).

—*Be Ready*, page 47

4. Review 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8. Why is patience such an important character trait for Christians, especially leaders? What happens when we’re impatient with other believers? What are the long-term benefits of being patient? (See, for example, 1 Cor. 13:4.)

From the Commentary

First Thessalonians 2:7 can read “even as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” What is the

lesson here? *A nursing mother imparts her own life to the child.* This is exactly what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. You cannot be a nursing mother and turn your baby over to someone else. That baby must be in your arms, next to your heart.

The nursing mother eats the food and transforms it into milk for the baby. The mature Christian feeds on the Word of God and then shares its nourishment with the younger believers so they can grow (1 Peter 2:1-3). A nursing child can become ill through reaction to something the mother has eaten. The Christian who is feeding others must be careful not to feed on the wrong things himself.

—*Be Ready*, page 47

5. What does nourishing a faith look like in practical terms? What was the “mother’s milk” that Paul fed to others? What are the kinds of “food” that can taint someone’s spiritual nourishment of another?

From the Commentary

Paul considered himself a “spiritual father” to the believers at Thessalonica, just as he did toward the saints at Corinth. “For if you were to have countless

tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15 NASB). The Spirit of God used the Word of God in Paul’s ministry, and many people in Thessalonica were born again into the family of God.

But the father not only begets the children, he also cares for them. As he defended his own work against false accusations, Paul pointed out three of his duties as the spiritual father to the Thessalonians.

—*Be Ready*, page 48

6. Paul talked about three duties: his work (v. 9); his walk (v. 10); his words (vv. 11-12). Describe what each duty was and what its purpose was. Why is work important? Why is walk important? Why are words important?

From the Commentary

The verb in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 is in the present tense: “who is continually calling you.” God called us to salvation (2 Thess. 2:13-14), and He is constantly calling us to a life of holiness and obedience. “But as he which hath called you is holy,

so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [behavior]; because it is written, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15–16).

This passage gives us a beautiful example of New Testament follow-up. Paul has shown us how to raise the babies. We must be faithful stewards, loving mothers, and concerned fathers. If we are not faithful to God, we may find ourselves becoming doting mothers and pampering fathers. Children need discipline as well as love. In fact, discipline is one evidence of love.

—*Be Ready*, page 51

7. In what ways is discipline evidence of love? What does Paul say about the role of discipline in the church? How does discipline work alongside teaching and faithfulness to grow the Thessalonian church despite the persecution it was facing? What practical lessons can we draw from this for the church today?

From the Commentary

The church has been founded on the Word of God (1 Thess. 1:6), the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The same Word that brings us salvation also

enables us to live for Christ and endure suffering for His sake. Paul was thankful that the saints in Thessalonica had the right spiritual attitudes toward the Word of God. This helped them endure in the hour of suffering.

They appreciated the Word. They did not receive it as the word of men; they received it as the Word of God. We must never treat the Bible as any other book, for the Bible is different in origin, character, content, and cost. The Bible is the Word of God. It was inspired by the Spirit of God (2 Tim. 3:16) and written by men of God who were used by the Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). God's Word is holy, pure, and perfect (Ps. 19:7-9). The Bible was written at great cost, not only to the writers, but to Jesus Christ, who became Man that the Word of God might be given to us.

The way a Christian treats his Bible shows how he regards Jesus Christ. He is the living Word (John 1:1, 14), and the Bible is the written Word, but *in essence* they are the same. Both are bread (Matt. 4:4; John 6:48), light (Ps. 119:105; John 8:12), and truth (John 14:6; 17:17). The Holy Spirit gave birth to Jesus Christ through a holy woman (Luke 1:35), and He gave birth to the Bible through holy men of God (2 Peter 1:20-21). Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God forever (Rom. 1:25), and the Word of God will live forever (Ps. 119:89; 1 Peter 1:23, 25).

8. Review 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What was the Word of God that Paul was teaching the Thessalonian church? How does our Bible compare to what Paul was teaching from? In what ways have some believers lost respect for the Word of God? Why is it so important to hold it in the proper regard? What happens when we stop doing that?

More to Consider: Read Job 23:12; Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 5:11-14; and Psalm 119:103. What does each of these passages teach us about the importance of God's Word to His people? In what ways is God's Word more valuable than food? Than riches? (See Ps. 119:14, 72, 127, 162.)

From the Commentary

In my pastoral work, I often found that suffering people can become very self-centered and think that they are the only ones going through the furnace. Everyone goes through the normal human suffering such as sickness, pain, and bereavement. But I am referring to the suffering we endure *because we are Christians*.

Perhaps your family has disowned you because of your faith, or perhaps you have been bypassed for a promotion at work because you are a Christian. These experiences hurt, but they are not ours alone. Other Christians are going through the same trials, and many, in other parts of the world, face much greater difficulty.

Not only were the Thessalonian saints imitators of the Lord and of Paul (1 Thess. 1:6), but they also became imitators of the Jewish believers in their experience of persecution. The saints in Judea suffered at the hands of the Jews, and the saints in Thessalonica suffered at the hands of the Gentiles. But keep in mind that even this Gentile persecution was encouraged by the Jewish unbelievers (Acts 17:5, 13).

—*Be Ready*, pages 59–60

9. Was Paul giving evidence of “religious bigotry” when he accused the Jews of killing Jesus Christ and persecuting the Christians? Why or why not? Read John 15:18–27. How does this shed light on the experiences of the Thessalonian church?

From the Commentary

Paul was not ashamed to state his affection for the Thessalonian Christians. He felt as though he had been “orphaned” from them (1 Thess. 2:17), since he was their spiritual mother and father (1 Thess. 2:7, 11). Paul wanted to remain there longer to help ground them in the faith, but the enemy drove him out. However, his absence was only physical; he was still with them in heart (see Phil. 1:7).

Paul made every effort possible to return to them, though Satan was “breaking up the road and putting up obstacles” (literal meaning of “hindered” in 1 Thess. 2:18). Paul had the same kind of deep desire to be with them as Jesus had to be with His disciples before His death (Luke 22:15).

—*Be Ready*, pages 61-62

10. Paul had every reason to look back and give in to regret. Why did he look ahead instead? What does this say about the role of faith in a Christian’s daily life? Why is it important to take the long view in times of trouble and testing? What is the long view today?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 1 Thessalonians 2. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. What are some of the ways you've practiced patience when counseling or teaching another believer? What frustrations did you experience? What joys? How easy has it been for you to practice patience in your faith? What are the best ways to grow in patience?

12. Describe one of the ways other believers have nourished your faith. What did they do to assess your current spiritual maturity? How did they (or didn't they) take that into consideration as they taught and mentored

you? What can you take from this experience to better prepare you to nourish others' faith?

13. Do you often find yourself living in regret? What prompts that attitude? Why is it dangerous to live in regret? How can your faith in Jesus help you to live forward, rather than constantly wondering what "could have been"?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to avoid empty flattery in your speech? Be specific. Go back through 1 Thessalonians 2 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: Take stock of the current trials you're facing at home, work, and in your spiritual life. One of the ways Paul helped the Thessalonians was teaching the importance of taking the "long view" on current strife. Talk with a close friend about the issues you're facing and why they seem untenable now. Then look together at a future time when those trials will be in the past, and ask God to help you get from here to there, according to His will. Learning to see the big picture is freeing and builds trust in God.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

-

Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with

other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.

•

During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.

•

Before you start the next lesson, read 1 Thessalonians 3. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapter 5, "Take a Stand!," in Be Ready.

Standing Strong

(1 THESSALONIANS 3)

Before you begin ...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Read 1 Thessalonians 3. This lesson references chapter 5 in Be Ready. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Before a child can walk, he must learn to stand. Usually the father and mother teach the child to stand and then to walk. Paul was “spiritual parent” to these believers, but he had been forced to leave Thessalonica. How, then, could he help these young Christians learn to stand in the trials of life?

In the first two chapters, Paul explained how the church was born and nurtured. Now he dealt with the next step in maturity: how the church was to stand. The key thought is expressed in 1 Thessalonians 3:8: “For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.”

—*Be Ready*, page 67

1. The key word in 1 Thessalonians 3 is *establish* (see vv. 2, 13). What does this word mean to the believers? What are the implications for all young churches? What does it mean to stand fast for God as a church? As an individual believer?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 1 Thessalonians 3 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

When Paul and his friends left Thessalonica, they went to Berea and ministered the Word. But the troublemakers from Thessalonica followed them and stirred up opposition. Paul left for Athens while Silas and Timothy remained at Berea (see Acts 17:10-15). Apparently, Timothy did join Paul in Athens (note the “we” in 1 Thess. 3:1-2), but Paul sent him back to Thessalonica.

The “wherefore” that opens chapter 3 refers to 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20, where Paul expressed his great love for the believers. It was because of this love that he could not abandon them when they needed spiritual help. Paul was not only an evangelist; he was also a pastor. He knew that soul winning was but one part of the commission God gave him. These new believers must also be taught and established in the faith.

—*Be Ready*, pages 67-68

3. Why did Paul decide to stay in Athens alone (3:1-5)? What commission did he give to Timothy? How was Paul’s decision to send Timothy a way to show love for the believers there? What does this small detail imply about training leaders and teachers in the church?

From the Commentary

Not every believer is equipped to establish other Christians in the faith. Ideally, every Christian should be mature enough to help other Christians grow in the Lord and learn to stand on their own two feet. Unfortunately, some Christians are like those described in Hebrews 5:11-14. They have gone backward in their spiritual walk and have forgotten the basic truths of the Word. Instead of teaching others, they themselves need to be taught again. They are going through a second childhood spiritually.

Timothy was the ideal man to send to the church to help them stand firm. Timothy and Titus were Paul's "special agents" whom he used as troubleshooters whenever the churches had problems. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to help straighten out the problems there (1 Cor. 16:10-11). He also planned to send Timothy to help the saints in Philippi (Phil. 2:19-23).

—*Be Ready*, pages 68-69

4. What kind of person can help younger believers grow in the Lord? What are the basic requirements for someone who can lead others? Why was Timothy the perfect choice to send to Thessalonica?

More to Consider: Timothy was a minister. This is simply the Greek word for a servant. Our English word deacon comes from this word diakonos. What were Timothy's qualifications as minister? (See Phil. 2:22.) How are today's deacons like Timothy?

From Today's World

Timothy had ministered with Paul prior to his work with the Thessalonian church. In the early days of the church, leaders were developed "on the job," as they learned from and ministered with others with more experience, like Paul, who had been preaching and teaching the gospel since the very beginning. Though some of those who became leaders in the early church likely had some formal training (in the Jewish faith, in the synagogue) most were probably learning the ins and outs of church leadership in the trenches.

5. Today, many pastors are trained formally in seminaries and colleges. How does that kind of training compare to what the early church leaders knew? What are the advantages of formal training? Of learning to lead on the job? What can we learn from how Paul mentored other leaders to help make our leaders today more competent?

From the Commentary

The trials and testings that come to our lives as Christians are not accidents—they are *appointments*. We must expect to “suffer for his sake” (Phil. 1:29). Persecution is not foreign to the believer (1 Peter 4:12ff.), but a normal part of the Christian life. Paul had repeatedly told them this while he was with them. We must warn new believers that the way is not easy as they seek to live for Christ, otherwise, when trials come, these babes in Christ will be discouraged and defeated.

Of course, behind these persecutions is Satan, the enemy of the Christian (1 Thess. 3:5). He is the tempter, and he seeks to ruin our faith. Note the emphasis on *faith* in this chapter (1 Thess. 3:5–7, 10). As a roaring lion, Satan stalks believers; and we must resist him “steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8–9). When Satan tempted Eve, he began by weakening her faith in God: “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1). As a serpent, Satan deceives (2 Cor. 11:3); as a lion, he devours (1 Peter 5:8). He will use any means to attack the Christian and weaken his faith in God.

—*Be Ready*, pages 69–70

6. The word *moved* (1 Thess. 3:3 KJV) or *unsettled* (NIV) literally means “to wag the tail, to fawn over.” Why is

Satan's "fawning" such a dangerous thing for believers? What challenges did this present to Timothy's role as encourager?

From the Commentary

Timothy met Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:5) and gave him the glad news that things were going well at Thessalonica. The phrase "brought us good tidings" is the exact equivalent of "preaching the good news of the gospel." The report from Timothy was, to Paul, like hearing the gospel.

Timothy reported that the new believers were standing firm in spite of persecution. They did not believe the lies that the enemy had told about Paul, but they still held him in the highest esteem in love.

Paul's response was to write them this letter. Paul wrote some letters that are not a part of the New Testament (1 Cor. 5:9), but the two letters to the Thessalonian church are a part of God's inspired Word.

—*Be Ready*, pages 70–71

7. How can the letters to the Thessalonians particularly help new Christians in their faith? What does it mean to

“stand firm” regarding the teachings Paul has given (see 2 Thess. 2:15)? Why did he encourage the Thessalonians to stand firm? What obstacles did they face that could have caused the church to stumble?

From the Commentary

The Bible is able to establish us because it is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16). It is not simply a book of religious ideas or good moral advice; it is the very Word of God. It is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” It has well been said that *doctrine* tells us what is right, *reproof* tells us what is not right, *correction* tells us how to get right, and *instruction* tells us how to stay right. First Thessalonians is saturated with Bible doctrines.

—*Be Ready*, page 71

8. Every major doctrine of the faith is touched on in 1 Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 3:11—4:10, underline the references to God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Circle the references to sin, holy living, love, and the return of Christ. Why did Paul focus so much on basic doctrine in this letter?

More to Consider: Paul helped many churches become places for young believers to grow in faith, even in difficult circumstances. Today's leaders are tasked with this job too. What is the responsibility of the local church in helping believers grow in the Word? (See 2 Tim. 2:2; Eph. 4:11-16.) What help do you think young believers need, especially if they are unfamiliar with the Bible and accustomed to highly stimulating media?

From the Commentary

The Word of God and prayer should go together. The prophet Samuel told the people of Israel, "God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way" (1 Sam. 12:23). Peter said, "But we [the apostles] will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Paul had this same emphasis: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God [prayer], and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up" (Acts 20:32).

Jesus prayed for His disciples, just as Paul prayed for the Thessalonian Christians, that their faith would not fail (Luke 22:31-32). I ministered for several weeks in Kenya and Zaire, and when I arrived home, I was more convinced than ever that the greatest need of missionaries and national churches is *prayer*. We must also pray for young Christians here at home. It is not enough to teach

them Bible truth; we must also support them in our prayers.

—*Be Ready*, pages 72–73

9. Review 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13. What did Paul ask God to do for the Thessalonians? Why was prayer so important to Paul and those he ministered to? How similar (or dissimilar) is our churches' emphasis on prayer today? Why is prayer so important to the local church?

From the Commentary

Paul ended 1 Thessalonians 2 with a reference to the place of the saints at the return of Christ, and he ended this chapter in the same way. He prayed that his converts might stand blameless and holy before God at Christ's return. Since all believers will be transformed to be like Christ when He returns (1 John 3:2), Paul could not be referring to our personal condition in heaven. He was referring to our lives here on earth as they will be reviewed at the judgment seat of Christ. We will never face our sins in heaven, for they are remembered against us no more (Rom. 8:1; Heb. 10:14–18). But our works

will be tested, and you cannot separate conduct from character.

Paul's prayer teaches us how to pray not only for new believers but for *all* believers. We should pray that their faith will mature, their love grow, and their character and conduct be holy and blameless before God. "And every man that hath this hope in him [Christ] purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

—*Be Ready*, page 75

10. What is the role of the church in caring for new Christians? How does that sometimes conflict with feeding the more mature believers? How can both be accomplished without sacrificing the other?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 1 Thessalonians 3. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members

take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. Have you ever mentored someone to grow as a believer or leader? If so, what did you do? How did you help them move toward maturity in the faith? What challenges did you face? What did you learn in the process of teaching another?

12. What are the church doctrines you struggle with most? How can Paul's teaching in 1 and 2 Thessalonians help you understand the value of doctrine, and of the church? Why is it important for individual believers to understand church doctrine? How does a solid knowledge of a church's inner workings help the typical churchgoer grow as a believer?

13. What is your current prayer life like? What are some of the ways you could improve your prayer life? Do you pray often for the leaders in your church? What are some things you can pray about that will help the church to grow and mature?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to learn how to better stand fast in your faith? Be specific. Go back through 1 Thessalonians 3 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: Set up a prayer night with your small group—or all the groups in your church—and spend that night praying for the church. Pray for your

pastors and leaders, for the small groups, for the outreach, the budget, the membership—for all aspects of the church experience. Then make this kind of prayer a regular part of your prayer life—to strengthen the church and your relationship with it.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

-

Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.

-

During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.

-

Before you start the next lesson, read 1 Thessalonians 4. For more in-depth lesson

preparation, read chapters 6 and 7, “How to Please Your Father” and “The Comfort of His Coming,” in Be Ready.

Faith and Hope

(1 THESSALONIANS 4)

Before you begin ...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Read 1 Thessalonians 4. This lesson references chapters 6 and 7 in Be Ready. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Along with jogging, walking has become a popular exercise and outdoor sport. I often see individuals and entire families enjoying a walk in the park or in the forest preserves. When driving on the highway, I sometimes wave to “walking parties” heading for some distant rendezvous.

The Christian life can be compared to a walk. In fact, this is one of Paul's favorite pictures: "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4:1); "walk not as other Gentiles walk" (v. 17); "walk in love" (5:2); "walk as children of light" (v. 8).

The Christian life begins with a step of faith. But that step leads to a walk of faith: "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Walking suggests progress, and we must make progress in the Christian life (Phil. 3:13-16; Heb. 6:1). Walking also demands strength, and God has promised, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33:25).

—*Be Ready*, page 79

1. What does the long walk of faith look like to someone who's a new Christian? To a seasoned believer? What does it mean to "walk in the light"? What are the dangers of walking outside of the light? (See 1 John 1:5-7.)

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 1 Thessalonians 4 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

The moral climate in the Roman Empire was not healthy. Immorality was a way of life; and, thanks to slavery, people had the leisure time to indulge in the latest pleasures. The Christian message of holy living was new to that culture, and it was not easy for these young believers to fight the temptations around them. Paul gave four reasons why they should live a holy life and abstain from sensual lusts.

(1) To please God (v. 1). Everybody lives to please somebody. Many people live to please themselves. They have no sensitivity to the needs of others. “The soul of a journey,” wrote William Hazlitt, “is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases.” That advice may work for a vacation, but it could never work in the everyday affairs of life. Christians cannot go through life pleasing only themselves (Rom. 15:1).

(2) To obey God (vv. 2-3). When he ministered in Thessalonica, Paul gave the believers the commandments of God regarding personal purity. The word *commandments* is a military term. It refers to orders handed down from superior officers. We are soldiers in God’s army, and we must obey orders. “No one serving as a soldier gets involved in

civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Tim. 2:4 NIV).

(3) To glorify God (vv. 4-5). This is the positive side of God’s commandment. Christians are supposed to be different from the unsaved. The Gentiles (unsaved) do not know God; therefore, they live ungodly lives. But we know God, and we are obligated to glorify Him in this world. “God’s plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean break with sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3 PH).

(4) To escape the judgment of God (vv. 6-8). God is no respecter of persons; He must deal with His children when they sin (Col. 3:23-25). A church member criticized her pastor because he was preaching against sin in the lives of Christians. “After all,” she said, “sin in the life of a believer is different from sin in the lives of unsaved people.”

—*Be Ready*, pages 80-82

3. Review 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. How does each of these reasons for living a holy life apply to today’s Christians? Why should we care about pleasing God? How do we live a holy life in an unholy world?

More to Consider: 1 Thessalonians 4:4 says you have to “control your own body.” Why is it important to control our bodies? (See 2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:20-21.) In what ways was this message appropriate for both married and single believers? (See 1 Cor. 6:18-20.)

What implications does this topic have for why God gives such demanding requirements for spiritual leadership in the church? (See 1 Tim. 3.)

From the Commentary

A holy walk involves a right relationship with God the Father (who called us), God the Son (who died for us), and God the Spirit (who lives within us). It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that makes our bodies the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Furthermore, it is by walking in the Spirit that we get victory over the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16ff.). To despise God’s commandments is to invite the judgment of God and also to grieve the Spirit of God.

How does the Spirit of God help us live a clean life, free from sexual impurity? To begin with, He creates holy desires within us so that we have an appetite for God’s pure Word (1 Peter 2:1-3) and not the polluted garbage of the flesh (Rom. 13:12-14). Also, He teaches us the Word and helps us to recall God’s promises in times of temptation (John 14:26; Eph. 6:17). As we yield to the Spirit, He empowers us to walk in holiness and not be detoured into the lusts

of the world and the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit overcomes the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:16-26).

—*Be Ready*, page 83

4. Why does Paul devote so much space to the theme of sexual purity? What does that say about the church of that day? How is this message equally (or even more) appropriate today?

From the Commentary

The transition from *holiness* to *love* is not a difficult one. Paul made this transition in his prayer recorded in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. Just as God's love is a holy love, so our love for God and for one another ought to motivate us to holy living. The more we live like God, the more we will love one another. If a Christian really loves his brother, he will not sin against him (1 Thess. 4:6). There are four basic words for "love" in the Greek language. *Eros* refers to physical love; it gives us our English word *erotic*. Eros love does not have to be sinful, but in Paul's day its main emphasis was sensual. This word is never used in the New Testament. Another word, *storge* (pronounced STOR-gay), refers to family love,

the love of parents for their children. This word is also absent from our New Testament, although a related word is translated “kindly affectioned” in Romans 12:10.

The two words most used for love are *philia* (fil-EE-uh) and *agape* (a-GA-pay). *Philia* love is the love of deep affection, such as in friendship or even marriage. But *agape* love is the love God shows toward us. It is not simply a love based on feeling; it is expressed in our wills. Agape love treats others as God would treat them, regardless of feelings or personal preferences.

—*Be Ready*, page 84

5. Review 1 Thessalonians 4:9–10. How does God cause our love to “increase more and more”? How important is emotion in God’s kind of love? In what ways are feelings of love important? In what ways is Christian love more than just feeling?

From the Commentary

The word in 1 Thessalonians 4:12 that is translated “honestly” in our Authorized Version carries the meaning of “becomingly, in a seemly way.” It is

translated “decently” in 1 Corinthians 14:40: “Let all things be done decently and in order.” The emphasis is on the believer’s witness to those who are outside the Christian fellowship. “Them that are without” is a familiar description of unbelievers.

Christians not only have the obligation to love one another but also to be good testimonies to the people of the world. Paul’s great concern was that the Thessalonian believers earn their own wages and not become freeloaders depending on the support of unbelievers. “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life” (1 Thess. 4:11 NIV) seems like a paradox; if you are ambitious, your life will probably not be quiet. But the emphasis is on quietness of mind and heart.

—*Be Ready*, pages 85–86

6. What’s wrong with being financially dependent on other people if we’re physically able to work and not raising children? How is work a testimony to others? How do we lead a “quiet life” while still sharing the gospel?

From the Commentary

How can mortal man penetrate beyond the grave and find assurance and peace for his own heart? From Old Testament days till the present, mankind has tried to solve the riddle of death and the afterlife. Philosophers have wrestled with the question of immortality. Spiritists have tried to communicate with those who have gone beyond.

In our modern world, scientists have investigated the experiences of people who claimed to have died and returned to life again. They have also studied occult phenomena, hoping to find a clue to the mystery of life after death.

—*Be Ready*, page 92

7. How did Paul solve the problem of worrying about life after death? (See 1 Thess. 4:15.) Why is it dangerous to substitute human speculation for divine revelation? How do we do that in today's church?

From the Commentary

We have noted the emphasis on the return of Christ in the Thessalonian letters. Paul related Christ's return to salvation (1 Thess. 1:9-10), service

(1 Thess. 2:19–20), and stability (1 Thess. 3:11–13). In 4:14–15, he related it to sorrow.

Paul applied the word *sleep* to those believers who died. Jesus used the same expression (John 11:11–13). Paul was careful to state that Jesus *died*; the word *sleep* is not applied to His experience.

—*Be Ready*, page 93

8. How can the doctrine of Jesus' return comfort the brokenhearted? Why is it notable that Paul used the word *sleep* to describe those who have died? What comfort does this phrasing bring to the living?

More to Consider: The Bible's definition of death is found in James 2:26: "The body without the spirit is dead." What implications does this statement have about our physical bodies? Why might this have been an important message to share with the young Christians in Thessalonica? Why is it still an important message today?

From the Commentary

When Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection to the Athenian philosophers, most of them mocked

him (Acts 17:32). To the Greeks, *being rid of the body* was their great hope. Why would any man want to have his body resurrected? Furthermore, *how* could his body be resurrected, when the elements of the body would decay and become a part of the earth? To them, the doctrine of resurrection was foolish and impossible.

When Jesus Christ returns in the air, He will issue the “shout of command” and the “dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16). This does not mean that He will put the elements of the body together again, for resurrection is not “reconstruction.” Paul argued for the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:35ff. He pointed out that the resurrection of the human body is like the growing of a plant from a seed. The flower is not the identical seed that was planted, yet there is continuity from seed to plant. Christians shall receive glorified bodies, like the glorified body of Christ (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:47-58). The dead body is the “seed” that is planted in the ground; the resurrection body is the “flower” that comes from that seed.

—*Be Ready*, pages 94-95

9. What is the assurance of the Christian doctrine of resurrection? What does the doctrine of resurrection say about the value of physical bodies? What happens to the

body in death? What happens to the soul? What happens to each at the resurrection? (See Phil. 1:20-24.)

From the Commentary

The word *rapture* is not used in this section, but that is the literal meaning of “caught up.” The Latin word *rapto* means “to seize, to carry off,” and from it we get our English word *rapture*.

Will the unsaved world be aware of what is happening? Will they hear the shout, the voice, and the trumpet? First Corinthians 15:52 indicates that this will happen so suddenly that it will be over in the twinkling of an eye. Since the shout, voice, and trumpet apply to God’s people, there is no reason to believe that the unsaved masses will hear them. If they do, they will hear sounds without meanings (see John 12:27-30). Millions of people will vanish instantly, and no doubt there will be chaos and great concern. Except for those who know the Bible teaching, the world will wonder at what has happened.

You and I shall meet the Lord in the air, in person, when He comes for us. The Greek word translated “meet” carries the idea of meeting a royal person or

an important person. We have walked with Christ by faith here on earth, but in the air we shall “see him as he is” and become like Him (1 John 3:1-2). What a meeting that will be!

—*Be Ready*, pages 96-98

10. Why is the rapture such a controversial theological concept? What does 1 Thessalonians tell us about this event? What’s the point of the rapture teaching? What is the ultimate “resting place” for believers?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you’ve explored thus far in this study of 1 Thessalonians 4. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don’t press for people to speak if they’re uncomfortable doing so.

11. What is your emotional reaction to Paul's teaching on sexual purity? Why is this topic so important? If this is an area of struggle for you, what are some things you can do to address that?

12. Do you think about death much? If so, what troubles you most about death? What comfort do you get from your faith? How important is the promise of the resurrection to you? What comfort does that promise give you?

13. What are your beliefs about the rapture? How important are end-time doctrines to your daily faith life? How do they shape your faith?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on

one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to make choices now in light of your future resurrection? Be specific. Go back through 1 Thessalonians 4 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: This week, practice living expectantly, as if Jesus could return any minute. This doesn't mean giving up work—we're called to work diligently right up until Jesus' return. But as you go through your daily routine at work, home, and/or school, carry with you a sense of eager anticipation about Jesus' return. Look for moments to share your faith or to stand strong in your faith, modeling the joy that comes from knowing Jesus. Then take that attitude beyond this week and into the next, and the next. Expectant living can make a world of difference not only to your attitude but also to the attitudes—and potentially, the eternities—of those whom you spend time with.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

-

Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.

-

During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.

-

Before you start the next lesson, read 1 Thessalonians 5. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapters 8 and 9, "Don't Walk in Your Sleep!" and "It's All in the Family," in Be Ready.

Sleepwalking

(1 THESSALONIANS 5)

Before you begin ...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Read 1 Thessalonians 5. This lesson references chapters 8 and 9 in Be Ready. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Jesus Christ both unites and divides. Those who have trusted Him as Savior are united in Christ as God's children. We are members of His body and "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). When Jesus Christ returns in the air, we shall be "caught up together" (1 Thess. 4:17) never to be separated again.

But Christ is also a divider. “So there was a division among the people because of him” (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). Faith in Jesus Christ not only unites us to other believers, it also separates us spiritually from the rest of the world. Jesus said, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:16). There is a difference between believers who are looking for the Lord’s return and the people of the world; it is this theme that Paul developed in this section.

His purpose was to encourage the believers to live holy lives in the midst of their pagan surroundings. He did this by pointing out the contrasts between believers and unbelievers.

—*Be Ready*, page 103

1. What are some of the differences Paul pointed out between believers and unbelievers in 1 Thessalonians 5? How are these contrasts still true today?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 1 Thessalonians 5 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something

that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Three phrases in 5:1-2 need careful consideration.

(1) “Times and seasons.” This phrase is found only three times in the Bible, and refers primarily to God’s plans for Israel. This is the way Daniel stated it when God gave him understanding of the king’s dream (Dan. 2:21). Our Lord’s use of the phrase in Acts 1:7 indicates that times and seasons relate primarily to Israel. God has a definite plan for the nations of the world (Acts 17:26), and Israel is the key nation.

(2) “The day of the Lord.” In the Bible, the word *day* can refer to a twenty-four-hour period or to a longer time during which God accomplishes some special purpose. In Genesis 2:3 the word means twenty-four hours, but in Genesis 2:4 it describes the entire week of Creation.

The day of the Lord is that time when God will judge the world and punish the nations. At the same time, God will prepare Israel for the return of Jesus Christ

to the earth to establish His kingdom. Read Amos 5:18ff.; Joel 2:1ff.; Zephaniah 1:14-18; and Isaiah 2:12-21 for a description of this great period.

(3) “Thief in the night.” Our Lord used this image in His own teaching (Matt. 24:42-43; Luke 12:35-40). It describes the suddenness and the surprise involved in the coming of the day of the Lord. In Revelation 3:3; 16:15, He used this image to warn believers not to be caught napping. Since we do not know when the Lord will return for His people, we must live in a constant attitude of watching and waiting, while we are busy working and witnessing.

—*Be Ready*, pages 103-104

3. What does each of these phrases reveal about the Thessalonian church’s challenges and obstacles? How is each of these phrases important to us today? How does the “day of the Lord” potentially relate to Revelation 6—19?

From the Commentary

The unsaved world will be enjoying a time of false peace and security just before these cataclysmic events occur. Note carefully the contrast between “they” and “you” (or “us”) throughout this entire

section, “they” referring to the unsaved. *They* will say, “Peace and safety!” but *we* will say, “Jesus is coming, and judgment is coming!”

The world is caught by surprise because men will not hear God’s Word or heed God’s warning. God warned that the flood was coming, yet only eight people believed and were saved (1 Peter 3:20). Lot warned his family that the city would be destroyed, but they would not listen (Gen. 19:12–14). Jesus warned His generation that Jerusalem would be destroyed (Luke 21:19ff.), and this warning enabled believers to escape; but many others perished in the siege.

—*Be Ready*, page 105

4. Read Matthew 24:37–39 and Luke 17:26–30. How did Jesus use these historical references to describe what will happen in the end-time? What is significant about the world being “caught by surprise” in these events, and in the end-time to come? How does this truth speak to those who have tried to predict specific events of the end-time? Why is it so important to our faith that we don’t know the day and time of future events? How does that grow our faith?

More to Consider: Unbelievers ridicule the idea of Christ's return (see 2 Pet. 3:3-4), while well-meaning believers have tried to set dates for our Lord's return, only to be embarrassed by their failures. Why does it seem there are always more believers intent on predicting the specific date of Jesus' return? What is it about a specific date that seems so enticing to these folks (and their followers)?

From the Commentary

There is a difference between being ready to go to heaven and being ready to meet the Lord. Anyone who has sincerely trusted Christ for salvation is ready to go to heaven. Christ's sacrifice on the cross has taken care of that. But to be ready to meet the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ is quite another matter. Scripture indicates that some believers will not be happy to see Jesus Christ! "And now, little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28).

Having been a pastor for many years, I have had the sad experience of seeing believers deliberately disobey the Word of God. I recall one young woman who stubbornly chose to marry an unsaved man. When I tried to help her from the Bible, she said, "I don't care what you say. I don't care what the Bible says. I'm going to get married!" In the light of

Hebrews 13:17, will she be happy at the judgment seat of Christ?

—*Be Ready*, page 107

5. How does living in expectation of Jesus' return make life better for believers? What are the practical results of living expectantly?

From the Commentary

To be sober minded means to be alert, to live with your eyes open, to be sane and steady. To make the contrast more vivid, Paul pictured two groups of people: One group was drunk and asleep, while the other group was awake and alert. Danger was coming, but the drunken sleepers were unaware of it. The alert crowd was ready and unafraid.

Since we are “sons of the day,” we should not live as those who belong to the darkness. “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering [immorality] and wantonness [indecent], not in strife and envying” (Rom. 13:12-13).

In other words, because “the day” is approaching, it is time to wake up, clean up, and dress up. And when we dress up, we had better put on “the breastplate of faith and love: and for a helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). Only the “armor of light” (Rom. 13:12) will adequately protect us in these last days before our Lord returns.

The sober-minded believer has a calm, sane outlook on life. He is not complacent, but neither is he frustrated and afraid. He hears the tragic news of the day, yet he does not lose heart. He experiences the difficulties of life, but he does not give up. He knows his future is secure in God’s hands, so he lives each day creatively, calmly, and obediently.

—*Be Ready*, pages 107–108

6. What does “outlook determines outcome” mean? How does it apply to this message from Paul? What does it mean to be a “sober-minded believer”? Where does passion for faith fit into that mind-set?

From the Commentary

Believers do not have to fear future judgment because it is not part of God’s appointed plan for us.

Will Christians go through the day of the Lord, that awful period of judgment that God will send on the earth? I think not, and verses like 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9 seem to support this. Christians have always gone through tribulation, since this is a part of dedicated Christian living (John 15:18-27; 16:33). But they will not go through *the* tribulation that is appointed for the godless world.

—*Be Ready*, page 110

7. Review 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11. Why do believers disagree on the matter of the tribulation? What is important for us to understand about this future event? What are the implications for believers if the church is raptured to heaven prior to the tribulation period? What are the implications if the tribulation occurs first?

From the Commentary

Paul's favorite name for believers was *brethren*. He used it at least sixty times in his letters, and in the two Thessalonian epistles, he used it twenty-seven times. Paul saw the local church as a family. Each member was born again by the Spirit of God and

possessed God's nature (1 Peter 1:22-25; 2 Peter 1:3-4). They all were part of God's family.

It is tragic when believers neglect or ignore the local church. No family is perfect and no local church is perfect, but without a family to protect him and provide for him, a child would suffer and die. The child of God needs the church family if he is to grow, develop his gifts, and serve God.

—*Be Ready*, page 117

8. What does Paul teach in this final section of 1 Thessalonians about the essentials for a happy, thriving church family? What role does the family play? How can we make our local churches more spiritual to the glory of God?

More to Consider: God has ordained leadership for the local church. It is true that we are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), but it is also true that the Head of the church has given gifts to people. What responsibilities do these people have to the local church? (See Eph. 4:7-16.) Just as the flock needs a shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1-5), so the family needs a leader. What responsibilities do the brethren have toward their spiritual leaders?

From the Commentary

In recent years, churches have rediscovered what we are calling “body life.” This is a scriptural concept, though it does not define all that is involved in the ministry of the local church, since there are other pictures of the church besides that of the body. Body life refers to the ministry of each Christian to the others, just as the various members of the human body minister to one another to maintain health and life.

Family members must learn to minister to one another. The older members teach the younger members and encourage them when they are in difficulty.

—*Be Ready*, page 120

9. Read Ephesians 4:12. What role does a spiritual leader in the church play in helping to equip its members? How do family members learn to minister to one another? (See Titus 2:3-5.)

From the Commentary

Worship is the most important activity of a local church family. Ministry must flow out of worship,

otherwise it becomes busy activity without power and without heart. There may be “results,” but they will not glorify God or really last. Many church services lack an emphasis on true worship and are more like religious entertainments, catering to the appetites of the congregation.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17–28, Paul named the various elements that make up the worship ministry of the church: prayer (v. 17); praise (v. 18); and the Word of God (vv. 19–21).

—*Be Ready*, pages 123–124

10. How is each of these three elements (prayer, praise, and God’s Word) important to the worship ministry of the local church? What happens if a church doesn’t include all three or overemphasizes one? How does a church’s approach to each of these elements shape that church?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you’ve explored thus far in this study of 1 Thessalonians 5. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. Have you ever thought about Jesus coming “like a thief in the night”? How does that make you feel? What is it about Jesus’ second coming that excites you? Does anything about it frighten or worry you? Explain.

12. If you knew the exact time of Jesus’ return, would that change the way you live out your faith? Explain. What is your initial response when you hear about someone who’s predicted the day of Jesus’ return? Do you think a prediction like this—even though wrong—brings people to Christ? Why or why not?

13. How do you incorporate the three elements of church worship (prayer, praise, and God's Word) in your personal worship? Do you find it difficult to include all three? If so, why? How does each of these three worship elements help you grow closer to God?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to make prayer more of a priority? Be specific. Go back through 1 Thessalonians 5 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: This week, celebrate the family nature of the church by inviting neighbors or

friends or other believers, you know to a time of fellowship and worship. Share a meal together, then spend time with each of the three worship elements—prayer, praise, and God’s Word—as you build your relationships and, in the process, grow God’s church.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you’ve noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

-

Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.

-

During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you’ve read and studied.

-

Before you start the next lesson, read 2 Thessalonians 1. For more in-depth lesson

preparation, read chapter 10, "No Rest for the Wicked," in Be Ready.

The Wicked

(2 THESSALONIANS 1)

Before you begin ...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Read 2 Thessalonians 1. This lesson references chapter 10 in Be Ready. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.

Getting Started

From the Commentary

The Christians in Thessalonica were grateful to God for Paul's first letter, but it did not immediately solve all their problems. In fact, the persecution grew worse, and some believers thought they were living in the time of the tribulation. Then a letter arrived claiming to be from Paul, stating that the day of the Lord was actually present. Needless to say, the

assembly was confused and frightened by this prospect.

Some of the believers concluded that since the Lord's coming was so near, they ought to quit their jobs and spend their time waiting for Him. This meant that the other members were under an extra burden to care for them. Satan was working overtime; as the lion, he was seeking to devour (1 Peter 5:7-8), and as the serpent, he was seeking to deceive (2 Cor. 11:3). It was in response to these needs that Paul wrote his second letter.

—*Be Ready*, page 131

1. Why might some of the believers have chosen to stop working and simply wait for Jesus to return? What did this say about their belief in Paul's teaching? About their misinterpretation of Paul's message?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 2 Thessalonians 1 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

After greeting his friends, Paul launched into a statement of praise to God for what He had been accomplishing in their lives. Paul was practicing his own admonition, “In everything give thanks” (1 Thess. 5:18). You cannot help but notice Paul’s repeated thanksgivings in these two letters (1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13). Not only does *prayer* change people and situations, but so does *praise*.

Once I was teaching a series of lessons in a church about Satan’s devices to defeat Christians. One of these devices is suffering, as in the case of Job. If Satan can put us into difficult circumstances, he may be able to weaken our faith.

“One of the best weapons for fighting Satan is praise,” I told my morning class. “In spite of his pain, Job was able to say, ‘Blessed be the name of the Lord!’ So, the next time things go wrong and you are tempted to get impatient, turn to God and give thanks.”

That evening, just before the class started, a woman rushed up to me and said, “It works! It works!” And then she told me about her afternoon and all that had happened. Her story was so unbelievable that I would have doubted it had I not known her

character. “But in it all I gave thanks,” she told me, “and God gave me the grace and strength I needed. It works. Praise works!”

No doubt the Thessalonian believers did not consider themselves to be very spiritual as they suffered, but Paul detected what God was doing among them. You and I are the worst ones to evaluate our own lives.

—*Be Ready*, page 132

3. Review 2 Thessalonians 1:1–4. How did Paul encourage the believers through thanksgiving? How can praise grow our faith? How can it address feelings of frustration or inadequacy in a believer’s faith life?

More to Consider: In the book Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, we read how Hudson Taylor’s faith in God grew from the first day he determined to live by faith in God alone. He learned to trust God for his salary, especially when his busy employer forgot to pay him. He learned to trust God for daily needs, and as his faith was tested, he grew in faith and was able to trust God for His supply for an entire missionary organization. Sometimes it seemed that God

had forgotten, but Taylor continued to pray and trust, and God answered.

How does this kind of trust lead to a deeper faith? Read Hebrews 11. How did the men and women in this chapter grow through obstacles or suffering?

From the Commentary

Suffering can make us selfish, but when suffering is mixed with grace and faith, it produces love. It is “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). When Christians suffer, their faith reaches *upward* to God, and their love reaches *outward* to their fellow believers.

Thoreau once described a city as a place where many people are “lonely together.” Residents of a high-rise apartment can be suffering greatly and the people in the next apartment know nothing about it. Our modern world can promote spiritual and emotional isolation and insulation, even to the point of our watching others suffer without really caring.

But for the Christian, suffering can help to produce abounding love. “Behold, how they love one another!” was the confession of the pagan world as it beheld the miracle of Christian fellowship. The early believers were only obeying the commandment of their Lord, “Love one another.”

—*Be Ready*, page 133

4. How can suffering become debilitating for believers? How did Paul address the issue of suffering? What can help believers continue to share God's love with others even if they are suffering?

From Today's World

In today's fast-paced world, patience has become something of a lost art. We can access pretty much any information we want with just a few keystrokes on a computer, order products that can be delivered to our homes overnight, and get caught up with local and national news with little more than a glance at our smartphones. The further away we get from an agrarian society (and most of us are quite a ways away from that), the fewer opportunities we have to practice waiting. Yet this is exactly what Jesus tells us to do, and what Paul preaches to the young church in Thessalonica.

5. How does our modern culture's obsession with "fast, now" affect the way we approach faith issues? Where can we turn to practice the patience Paul teaches? Is it important to take time away from the always-connected worlds we choose these days? Why or why not? How can our right-away thinking actually work to our advantage as believers?

From the Commentary

Perhaps “perseverance” would be the best translation of the Greek word in verse 4. “Tribulation works out endurance” (Rom. 5:3, literal translation). You do not become patient and persevering by reading a book (even this one) or listening to a lecture. *You have to suffer.*

What were these believers enduring? Paul used several words to describe their situation: *persecutions*, which means “attacks from without,” or “trials”; *tribulations*, which literally means “pressures,” or afflictions that result from the trials; and *trouble* (2 Thess. 1:7), which means “to be pressed into a narrow place.” No matter how we look at it, the Thessalonian Christians were not having an easy time.

—*Be Ready*, page 134

6. How does the phrase “God never wastes suffering” apply to what Paul taught the Thessalonian church? How do trials work *for* us, not *against* us? (See 2 Cor. 4:15–18; James 1:1–5.) What happens to our faith when we rebel and fight our circumstances?

From the Commentary

No matter how difficult their present circumstances may have been, the Thessalonian believers had a secure and glorious future. In fact, their sufferings were evidence, “a manifest token,” that God was righteous, working out His great plan for them. We are prone to think that suffering proves that God does not care, when just the opposite is true.

—*Be Ready*, page 135

7. Review 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10. Why are believers tempted to believe suffering means God doesn't care? How is suffering evidence of God's work in us? How does the way we act in times of trial prove to others that God is at work? (See Phil. 1:28-30.)

From the Commentary

As Christians, we must live for eternity and not just for the present. In fact, living “with eternity's values in view” is what makes our Christian life meaningful today. We walk by faith and not by sight.

This brings to mind the story of the two farmers, one a believer and the other an atheist. When harvest season came, the atheist taunted his believing

neighbor because apparently God had not blessed him too much. The atheist's family had not been sick, his fields were rich with harvest, and he was sure to make a lot of money.

"I thought you said it paid to believe in God and be a Christian," said the atheist.

"It does pay," replied the Christian. "But God doesn't always pay His people in September."

What kind of a future does the unbeliever face? Look at the dramatic words Paul used to describe it: tribulation, vengeance, flaming fire, punishment, and everlasting destruction. The Christ-rejecting world will receive from God exactly what it gave to God's people! When God recompenses, He pays in kind, for there is a law of compensation that operates in human history.

—*Be Ready*, pages 136–137

8. What does it mean to "live for eternity"? Paul described the future for unbelievers in vivid and dramatic terms (tribulation, vengeance, flaming fire, punishment). How might the young church have responded to hearing this? Is fear a reasonable motivator to turn people toward faith? Explain.

More to Consider: Pharaoh tried to drown all the male babies born to the Jews, and his own army was drowned in the Red Sea. Haman plotted to wipe out the Jews, and he and his own sons were wiped out. The advisers of King Darius forced him to arrest Daniel and throw him into a lions' den, but later they themselves were thrown to the lions. The unbelieving Jewish leaders who sacrificed Christ in order to save the nation (see John 11:49-53) in a few years saw their city destroyed and their nation scattered. How does God deal with nonbelievers, as recorded in these stories? How does this line up with what Paul is teaching? How can these stories motivate believers?

From the Commentary

God will recompense tribulation to the lost, but rest to the saved. I believe that the first phrase in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 should be treated as a parenthesis: "to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you (and to you who are troubled, rest with us) when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed." The saints receive their rest when the Lord returns in the air and catches us up to be with Him.

The word *rest* means "relief, release, not under pressure." It is the opposite of "tribulation." The word describes the releasing of a bowstring. In this life, God's people are pressured, "pressed out of measure" (2 Cor. 1:8), and under the burdens of trial

and persecution. But when we see Christ, we will be released. We need not fear fiery wrath and judgment (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9), for God has already judged our sins at Calvary.

—*Be Ready*, pages 138–139

9. What kind of future is there for the lost (2 Thess. 1:9)? For the saved (Rev. 22:4)? What does the phrase *everlasting destruction* mean? (See Matt. 25:41.)

From the Commentary

Paul prayed for his converts (1 Thess. 1:2; 3:10). His “wherefore” in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 means “And because of all I have just said”—the return of Christ to be glorified in the saints, and to judge the lost. The future prospect of glory motivated the apostle to pray for the saints. We must never neglect a present responsibility because of a future hope. On the contrary, the future hope must encourage us to be faithful today.

There were three concerns in Paul’s prayer.

(1) Their worthiness (v. 11a).

(2) Their walk (v. 11b).

(3) Their witness (v. 12).

—*Be Ready*, pages 139-141

10. Address each of the three concerns Paul noted in his prayer as listed above. What are the practical aspects of each area? What actions by the Thessalonians would have addressed each of the concerns?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 2 Thessalonians 1. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. Describe a time when you struggled in your faith because you were suffering. How did you get through that

season? How did your faith suffer or grow in the midst of that time? Where can you turn when your faith is challenged because of suffering?

12. What are the circumstances in life that test your faith most? What are some ways you persevere in your faith? What does perseverance look like in practical terms?

13. Does the fear of separation from God (or any of the dark truths Paul used to describe unbelievers) affect the way you approach your own faith? Explain. What are some positive motivations to seek a relationship with God (in contrast to the “fire insurance” approach that brings some to Christ)?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you’d like to work on in the coming week. Remember that

this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to learn how to live for eternity and not just for the present? Be specific. Go back through 2 Thessalonians 1 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: Paul talked not only about being patient in difficult times but also about the importance of moving toward Jesus—of taking actions that can build faith and help us prepare for the challenging times to come. There are some obvious ways to do this (going to church, reading the Bible, praying), but what are some other little things you can do to “keep moving” toward Jesus? Think about things that can fit in small periods of time—five minutes here and there—like specific prayer sessions, focused study or discussion times, expressing gratitude throughout the day, etc. Brainstorm a few creative ideas for your spiritual journey (and if you have one, your family's); then implement those in the week to come.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

-

Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.

-

During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.

-

Before you start the next lesson, read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapter 11, "God's Timetable," in Be Ready.

In God's Time

(2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12)

Before you begin ...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. This lesson references chapter 11 in Be Ready. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.

Getting Started

From the Commentary

The purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar but to build character. Paul emphasized this fact in both of his Thessalonian letters, and our Lord warned us not to set dates for His coming (Matt. 24:36, 42). Date setters are usually upsetters, and that is exactly what happened in the Thessalonian assembly.

Someone had deceived the believers into thinking they were already living in the day of the Lord. The teaching probably first came through a “prophetic utterance” in one of their meetings, and then it was further enhanced by a letter claiming to come from Paul himself. The believers were instantly shaken by this teaching and continued to be deeply troubled. Had God changed His program? Had not Paul promised them deliverance from the tribulation (see 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9)?

—*Be Ready*, page 145

1. How did Paul calm the Thessalonians’ fears about the “time of the Lord”? Paul seems to be preaching two distinct messages in 2 Thessalonians—one encouraging believers to be ready for Jesus’ return, the other cautioning them not to get too anxious about that return. How do those two messages work together?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with

you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Paul appealed to them to “calm down” on the basis of the truth he had taught them in his first letter: The Lord would return and catch up His own to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:13–18). This is “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and ... our gathering together unto him” (2 Thess. 2:1). Not two separated events, but one great event that will occur suddenly and without warning.

Once the church is out of the world, Satan and his forces will unfold their program. The day of the Lord is the period that follows the rapture of the church. It will be a time of tribulation for the people on earth: Satan and his hosts will be working on earth, and God will send righteous judgments from heaven.

—*Be Ready*, page 146

3. Review 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 6–7. What is it about the rapture that poses a challenge for theologians and individual believers? Why might the church need to be out

of the world before Satan enacts his plan? Review Revelation 6—19. How do these chapters describe this period of time?

More to Consider: In 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7, Paul mentioned a restraining force that even today is helping keep everything on schedule. Who or what is this restrainer? How is this restrainer at work in the world even now (see 2 Thess. 2:7b)?

From the Commentary

In spite of its weakness and seeming failure, never underestimate the importance of the church in the world. People who criticize the church do not realize that the presence of the people of God in this world gives unsaved people opportunity to be saved. The presence of the church is delaying the coming of judgment. Lot was not a dedicated man, but his presence in Sodom held back the wrath of God (Gen. 19:12–29).

—*Be Ready*, page 147

4. There are two programs at work in the world today: God's program of salvation and Satan's program of sin.

How does God's timetable affect Satan's plans? What does the fullness of time for the coming of Christ refer to (see Gal. 4:4 KJV)? What then does the "fullness of time" mean when referring to the appearance of the Antichrist?

From the History Books

In the early days of the church, it was common for leaders to refer to all who taught heresy as "antichrists." But throughout history, there have also been individuals or groups keen on naming the Antichrist as a specific person—from Nero to the pope. In fact, many notable church reformers, including Martin Luther and John Calvin, referred to the papacy as the Antichrist. In more modern times, fringe groups have pointed to government leaders (including various presidents) and even corporate leaders as likely candidates for the specific title of Antichrist.

5. Why do some Christians believe with such confidence that they know the identity of the Antichrist? What prompts this kind of thinking? Where are they going wrong in their thinking? Is it important for us to know who the Antichrist is today? Why or why not?

From the Commentary

Paul did not use the term *Antichrist* in his letter. This term is used in the New Testament only by John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). But this is the name we use to identify the last great world dictator, whom Paul designated as “that man of sin,” “the son of perdition” (2 Thess. 2:3), and “that lawless one” (2 Thess. 2:8, literal translation).

Satan has been at war with God ever since he, as Lucifer, rebelled against God and tried to capture God’s throne (Isa. 14:12-15). He tempted Eve in the garden and, through her, caused Adam to fall (Gen. 3). In Genesis 3:15, God declared war on Satan and his family (“seed”) and promised the coming of the Redeemer, who would finally and completely defeat Satan.

—*Be Ready*, page 147

6. The Greek prefix *anti-* has two meanings: “against” and “instead of.” What does this tell us about the role of the Antichrist? What resources did Paul have to help the young believers understand the role and purpose of the Antichrist (though he doesn’t specifically use this term)? What additional resources do we have today to explore this controversial subject?

From the Commentary

Prophetic students may not agree on every detail, but the main facts, when they are related, give us a pretty good description of Antichrist in the last days. The first two traits are “peacemaker” and “protector.”

The peacemaker (Rev. 6:1-2). Certainly, this man will be on the scene before the rapture of the church. He will be a peaceful political leader who unites ten nations of Europe into a strong power bloc (see Rev. 17:12-13). The rider on the white horse imitates Christ (Rev. 19:11ff.). He goes forth to conquer peacefully: He has a bow, but no arrows. He will bring a brief time of peace to the world (1 Thess. 5:1-3) before the storm of the day of the Lord breaks loose.

The protector (Dan. 9:24-27). We cannot examine the exciting details of this prophecy, but it is important to note several facts. First, the prophecy applies to Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple, but not to the church. Second, it announces the time when Messiah will come and accomplish certain purposes for the Jewish people. The word *week* refers to a period of seven years; seventy weeks are equal to 490 years. Note that these 490 years are divided into three parts: seven weeks or forty-nine years, during which the city would be rebuilt; sixty-two weeks or 434 years, at the end of which time

Messiah would come and be cut off; one week or seven years, during which a “prince” would have a covenant with Israel.

—*Be Ready*, page 148

7. Why would the Antichrist take on such positive character traits? How does this align with some of Satan’s other familiar tactics in our lives? Why might God allow Satan to be so clever in the end-time? What does this reveal about God’s ultimate plan?

From the Commentary

The other traits of the Antichrist include “peace-breaker” and “persecutor.”

The peace-breaker (Dan. 9:27). After three and one half years, Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews *and take over their temple*. This was what Paul termed “a falling away” (2 Thess. 2:3b). A better translation would be “the rebellion, the apostasy.” Not simply *a* rebellion, but *the* rebellion. Up to this point, Antichrist has been a peacemaking leader of ten European nations, obligated to protect Israel. But now he reveals his true character by

taking over the Jewish temple and demanding that the world worship him (see Rev. 13).

Since Antichrist will be energized by Satan, it is no surprise that he will seek worship, for Satan has always wanted the worship of the world. There have been various “apostasies” in church history, when groups have turned away from God’s truth; but this final rebellion will be the greatest of all. The man of sin will oppose everything that belongs to any other religion, true or false. He will organize a world church that will, by worshipping him, worship Satan.

Our Lord predicted this apostasy; He called it “the abomination of desolation” (Matt. 24:15), a clear reference to Daniel 9:27. The world will wonder at this great leader who, with Satan’s power, will perform signs and wonders and deceive the nations.

The persecutor (Rev. 13:15-17). Most prophetic students agree that the abomination of desolation will occur three and one half years after the Antichrist makes his covenant with the Jews. (Dan. 9:27—“in the midst of the week” or three and one half years.) This will usher in a period of intense persecution and tribulation. Jesus said, “For then shall be great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). Satan will vent his wrath against Israel. He will so control the world’s economic system that citizens must bear

“the mark of the beast” to be able to buy and sell (Rev. 13:16–17).

—*Be Ready*, pages 149–150

8. How do these two roles—peace-breaker and persecutor—help define the true character of the Antichrist? What does it mean to take the “mark of the beast”? How does such an economic system benefit Satan’s mission?

More to Consider: Read Revelation 7:1–17. What do these verses tell us about those who (if anyone) will be saved during the seven-year period? What does this say about the Holy Spirit’s work during this time?

From the Commentary

The event described in 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10 and Revelation 19:11ff is Jesus’ return to earth in glory and judgment. It will occur at the end of the seven-year tribulation period when the “mystery of iniquity” (Satan’s evil program) will have ended with the battle of Armageddon. It is important that we distinguish His rapture of the church from His return to the earth. The first event is secret, as the church is caught up to meet Him in the air. The

second event is public, when the church returns with Him to defeat Satan and his hosts.

Nobody on earth will be able to overcome the Antichrist and his forces, for he is energized by Satan. “Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” (Rev. 13:4).

—*Be Ready*, page 151

9. What is the point of Satan’s “powers and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9 KJV; see also Acts 2:22)? Why do you think Satan chooses to imitate Christ? What is the point of that? How does Satan do that in our lives even today? Why is there power in imitation?

From the Commentary

We have noted that a great number of Jews and Gentiles will be saved during the seven-year tribulation period. But the vast majority of the world’s population will be lost. Many will die in the terrible judgments that God will send on earth (see Rev. 6:7–8; 8:11; 9:18; 11:13). Others will perish in judgment when Jesus Christ returns and separates the saved from the lost (Matt. 25:31–46).

It is important to note that these people did have opportunity to believe and be saved. God has no delight in judging the lost (Ezek. 33:11). God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). These people will be judged and will suffer forever because they would not receive and believe the truth. In fact, their hearts will be so evil that they will not even have any *love* for the truth. Those who love lies and make lies will be excluded from the heavenly city (Rev. 22:15) and sent to the lake of fire.

In this paragraph, Paul taught a sobering truth: A person can so resist the truth that he finally becomes deluded and has to believe a lie. There can be no neutral ground: Either we believe the truth or we believe a lie. To reject the truth means to receive the lie.

—*Be Ready*, pages 152-153

10. Does the fact that many will reject the truth mean God is to blame for the rejection of Christ? Why or why not? How is this similar to God’s role in the life of Pharaoh, when Moses was bringing plagues on Egypt? In what ways did Pharaoh harden his heart toward God? How do those who reject Christ do the same thing today?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. What are some of the signs you see that suggest Jesus is coming soon? What are some ways you live with that kind of expectation? Do you ever get too anxious about Jesus' return? If so, what prompts that anxiety? How can you develop an "eager patience" about Jesus' return that can help others grow in their faith?

12. What are your greatest fears about the end-time? How do those fears enhance or detract from your relationship with God? How much time do you spend worrying about (or

even studying, for that matter) the end-time? How does that time compare to worrying about the issues and concerns that matter today?

13. What is your interpretation of the events that will happen in the end-time? Are these beliefs critical to your faith story? Why or why not? What aspects of last-days teaching are helpful to the development of your relationship with God?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to cultivate eager patience regarding Jesus' return and apply that to some aspect of your life? Be specific. Go back through 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: This week, look not for the Antichrist but the anti-Antichrist—leaders around the world who are preaching the gospel and doing God's work from a position of power. Spend time praying for each of these leaders, asking God to continue to give them wisdom and humility and a desire to serve Christ above all else.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

-

Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with

other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.

•

During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.

•

Before you start the next lesson, read 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:18. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapters 12 and 13, "Nothing but the Truth" and "Order in the Church," in Be Ready.

Truth

(2 THESSALONIANS 2:13—3:18)

Before you begin ...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:18. This lesson references chapters 12 and 13 in Be Ready. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Paul's emphasis was on the truth of God's Word, in contrast to Satan's great lie, which Paul discussed in the previous section. Every believer has four responsibilities to God's truth. The first is to believe the truth.

We have noted Paul's repeated thanksgiving in his letters to this church (1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13). He gave thanks for the way they responded to God's work in their lives. In these two verses, Paul reviewed the stages in their salvation experience.

God loved them (v. 13a).

God chose them (v. 13b).

God set them apart (v. 13c).

God called them (v. 14a).

God gave them glory (v. 14b).

—*Be Ready*, pages 159–161

1. Review 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14. Why does Paul review their salvation experience here, after talking so much about the end-time? Why does each of the five stages noted in the commentary matter to the young Christians? What value is there in periodically reviewing our salvation story?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:18 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with

you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Paul had told them about the *future* rebellion against the truth (2 Thess. 2:3), the great apostasy headed by the Antichrist. But he also warned in his letters that there was a *present* danger, and that the church must guard God's truth and not turn from it. There are repeated warnings about this in the New Testament: 1 John 2:18-24; 4:1-3; 2 Peter 2; 1 Timothy 4; and 2 Timothy 3, to name only a few.

God works in this world through the truth of His Word, and Satan opposes this truth by substituting his lies. Human nature is prone to believe a lie and resist the truth. Satan accomplishes his best work through people in so-called Christian institutions (churches, schools, and so forth) who do not believe God's truth. They have "a form of godliness" but have never experienced the power of God's saving truth.

When Paul used the word *traditions*, he was not referring to man-made religious ideas that are not

based on the Word of God. Our Lord rejected man's religious traditions (Mark 7:1-13). Paul warned against them in Colossians 2:8. It is sad to see religious people argue over man's traditions and, at the same time, reject the simple truth of the Word of God.

—*Be Ready*, pages 161-162

3. Review 2 Thessalonians 2:15. What does it mean to guard the truth? What is the truth we must guard? How do we distinguish between human's truth and God's truth?

More to Consider: The word tradition simply means "that which is handed down from one person to another." The truth of the gospel began as an oral message proclaimed by Christ and the apostles. Later, this truth was written down by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it became Holy Scripture (see 2 Tim. 3:12-17; 2 Pet. 2:16-21). Where does God's truth come from? (See 1 Cor. 15:1-6; Gal. 1:11-12.) What is our role in passing this truth along? (See 2 Tim. 2:2.)

From the Commentary

It is not enough to believe the truth and guard it; we must also practice it. If we hear the Word but do not obey it, we are only fooling ourselves (James 1:22-25).

These two verses record Paul's desire and prayer for his friends: He wanted God to *encourage* them ("comfort your hearts") and *establish* them ("stablish you") "in every good word and work." Both of these words are prominent in the Thessalonian letters.

When Paul was with them, he *encouraged* them individually as a father does his children (1 Thess. 2:11). He sent Timothy to encourage them (1 Thess. 3:2), and Paul himself was greatly encouraged with Timothy's report of their faithfulness (1 Thess. 3:7).

Paul encouraged them to walk to please God (1 Thess. 4:1), and to grow in their love for others (1 Thess. 4:10). He taught them about the rapture of the church in order that they might encourage each other (1 Thess. 4:18). To calm their fears, he explained the day of the Lord to them (1 Thess. 5:1-11). In addition to his teaching, he urged them to minister to each other (1 Thess. 5:14-18).

Paul was concerned about two aspects of their Christian life: their *word* and their *work*, their *saying* and their *doing*. If our walk contradicts our words, we lose our testimony. Our "walk" and our

“talk” must agree; good works and good words must come from the same yielded heart.

—*Be Ready*, pages 163–164

4. Review 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17. How do we practice the truth? How is this distinct from guarding the truth? What does it look like to demonstrate the truth? How does our demonstration of the truth bring others to faith?

From the Commentary

A sequence of responsibilities is logical. Learning and living must go together. If we believe the truth, it changes our lives. We guard the truth and practice it so that we can share it with others. We cannot share what we do not believe (unless we want to be hypocrites), and we can best share that which we have practiced ourselves.

God’s Word is alive (Heb. 4:12); we must let it move freely. Paul alluded here to Psalm 147:15—“He sendeth forth His commandment upon earth: His word runneth very swiftly.” God’s servants may be bound, but God’s Word cannot be bound (2 Tim. 2:9). As we practice the truth and pray for the

ministry of the truth, God's Word will have freedom to run and accomplish God's purposes in the world.

—*Be Ready*, page 165

5. What does Paul teach us in 2 Thessalonians about the role of sharing our faith with others? Why was that critical to the early church? Why is that critical even today? Does Paul tell us explicitly how to share our faith? Why or why not? What does this suggest about how each of us can accomplish that mission?

From the Commentary

It is not enough that the pastor or church officers alone share the Word; each Christian must be a part of this vital ministry. Christ is the Captain of our salvation; we are His soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3-4). In a battle, it is not enough for only the officers to fight; every man must do his duty. This is also true in the work of the local church.

What if an army were run with the same lack of obedience, order, and discipline that we often see in the local church? It would never win the war. If soldiers attended drill whenever they felt like it, they would never be equipped to face the enemy. If

the recruits disobeyed their officers' orders the way some church members disobey the Word of God, they would be court-martialed.

A soldier obeys primarily out of loyalty and fear. But a Christian has much higher motives for obedience: God's love and Christ's return (2 Thess. 3:5). "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). A commanding officer does not require his men to love him, but if they do, they will respect and obey him with greater diligence. The history of warfare records heroic deeds done by men who loved their leaders and willingly died for them. Our Savior loved us and died for us. Can we not obey Him?

—*Be Ready*, page 167

6. The word *command* that Paul used in 2 Thessalonians 3:4 means "a military order passed down from a superior officer." Why does Paul use military language when talking about sharing the gospel? (See also 1 Thess. 4:2; 2 Thess. 3:4, 6, 10, 12.) What does this tell us about the approach we should take to sharing God's truth? Where does the metaphor break down? What is another metaphor from today's world that can describe our roles in spreading the good news of the gospel?

From the Commentary

When problems are not solved, they grow and become worse. A sliver left in the finger can become infected and cause a toxic condition so serious that surgery may become necessary. If you tell your doctor that you stepped on a rusty nail, he will immediately give you a tetanus shot, even though the wound may appear insignificant to you.

Church problems are like physical problems: If left unsolved, they grow and become worse, and they infect more people. The local church is a body, and what germs are to the physical body, sin is to the spiritual body. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonian church, he warned the idle busybodies to get to work (1 Thess. 4:11). He admonished the church leaders to “warn them that are unruly” (1 Thess. 5:14). The word *unruly* means “a soldier out of rank.” Apparently these troublemakers did not repent, because Paul devoted the rest of his second letter to this problem.

What was the problem? Some members of the assembly had misinterpreted Paul’s teachings about the return of Christ, left their jobs, and were living off the generosity of the church. They were idle while others were working. Yet they expected the church to support them. It is possible that this group of lazy saints was the source of the false teaching Paul mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. They were

also spreading gossip about people in the church. They had time on their hands and gossip on their lips, but they defended themselves by arguing, “The Lord is coming soon!”

—*Be Ready*, pages 171–172

7. What is the danger of misinterpretation or misapplication of God’s truth? What is the best way to determine if a teaching is biblical or unbiblical? What role does church leadership play in this process? The congregation? Prayer? The Bible itself?

From the Commentary

What authority did Paul have to issue this command: “If any is not willing to work, neither should he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10, literal translation)? He had the authority of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. At least twenty times in the Thessalonian letters, Paul used this complete title of the Savior. *Jesus* means “Savior” and is His human name (Matt. 1:21). *Christ* is His divine title; it means “Messiah—the Anointed One.” Other persons could use the name Jesus (the Hebrew form is “Joshua”); and other persons could claim to be anointed, such as prophets, priests, and

kings. But the two names, Jesus Christ, are further defined by the name *Lord*, “Jehovah God.”

—*Be Ready*, page 173

8. What does it mean to speak on the authority of Jesus Christ? How did people abuse that right in Paul’s time? In today’s world? What must we do before we can speak “in Jesus’ name” to other believers or nonbelievers?

More to Consider: What’s similar about the characters in each of the following stories when God chose them to enter His service: Moses (Exod. 3); Joshua (Exod. 33:11); Gideon (Judg. 6:11–40); David (1 Sam. 16:1–13.); Paul (Acts 8:1–3)? Why did God choose people who were already busy doing life? What does that suggest about how we ought to be living today?

From the Commentary

As an apostle, Paul had the right to expect financial support, but he deliberately gave up this right that he might be an example to the young believers (see 1 Cor. 9:6–14). In this attitude, Paul proved himself to be a mature Christian leader. Selfish leaders use people to build up their support, and they are

always claiming their rights. A truly dedicated leader will use his rights to build up the people, and will lay aside his rights and privileges for the sake of others.

He had referred to his example in labor in his previous letter (1 Thess. 2:9). His readers knew that Paul and his associates had not taken any support from the infant church. Instead, they had set the example of meeting their own needs and also helping to meet the needs of others. “You ought to imitate us,” he admonished his readers.

—*Be Ready*, page 175

9. Review 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10. How did Paul make himself an example for the young believers in how to live out a life of faith? Why is there such power in godly examples, even when compared to godly teaching? What’s the difference between authority and stature? How does a believer gain stature?

From the Commentary

Second Thessalonians 3:13 is the key: “And you, brothers, do not lose heart doing good!” (literal translation). The faithful Christians were

discouraged by the conduct of the careless saints who refused to work. “If *they* don’t have to work, why should *we*?” was their argument, and Paul nipped it in the bud.

Sin in the life of a believer always affects the rest of the church. As members of His body, we belong to one another and we affect one another. The bad example of a few saints can destroy the devotion, and hinder the service, of the rest of the church.

Paul named the sins of this group. To begin with, they were “disorderly,” or out of order, out of rank. They were disobeying orders, and this brought confusion and division to the assembly. Further, they were “busybodies,” not busy workers. The Greek word for “busybody” literally means “to be working around”; that is, busy but “fooling around” and not accomplishing anything. First Timothy 5:13 suggests that busybodies meddle in matters that do not belong to them.

Almost every culture has its saying about idleness. The Romans said, “By doing nothing, men learn to do evil.” Isaac Watts wrote: “For Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do.” The Jewish rabbis taught, “He who does not teach his son a trade, teaches him to be a thief.”

—*Be Ready*, page 176

10. What are the sins of idleness that the church faces today? How should church leaders address this issue? In what ways is work a good antidote to wrong thinking and speculation about end-time doctrines?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:18. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. Summarize your salvation story. What roles did other believers play in your story? Where was God throughout your journey to salvation? How can knowing your own story help you share God's message of salvation with others, even though each of us comes to Jesus in a unique way?

12. How comfortable are you sharing your faith with others? How do you go about this? What challenges do you face in sharing the gospel? How can Paul's message to the Thessalonians encourage you as well?

13. What are some ways you're a good example for other believers? What are some ways you exemplify Christ for nonbelievers? Is it important for you to know you're a good example? Why or why not? What are your greatest challenges in maintaining good habits and being a good example?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to better share your faith with others? Be specific. Go back through 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:18 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to share the good news by their words and actions. This week, you can do the same. Perhaps you're uncomfortable talking about your personal faith. Push beyond that discomfort, and take advantage of any opportunities you can to share why a relationship with God is so important to you. Use Paul's words in 1 and 2 Thessalonians as your guide, and also as your text, should you get a chance to share Scripture passages with friends, coworkers, or family members who don't yet know Jesus. In all things, pray for God's wisdom and guidance.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

-

Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.

-

During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.

Summary and Review

Notes for Small Groups: This session is a summary and review of this book. Because of that, it is shorter than the previous lessons. If you are using this in a small-group setting, consider combining this lesson with a time of fellowship or a shared meal.

Before you begin...

-

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.

-

Briefly review the notes you made in the previous sessions. You will refer back to previous sections throughout this bonus lesson.

Looking Back

1. Over the past eight lessons, you've examined 1 and 2 Thessalonians. What expectations did you bring to this study? In what ways were those expectations met?

2. What is the most significant personal discovery you've made from this study?

3. What surprised you most about 1 and 2 Thessalonians? What, if anything, troubled you?

Progress Report

4. Take a few moments to review the Going Forward sections of the previous lessons. How would you rate your progress for each of the things you chose to work on? What adjustments, if any, do you need to make to continue on the path toward spiritual maturity?

5. In what ways have you grown closer to Christ during this study? Take a moment to celebrate those things. Then think of areas where you feel you still need to grow and note those here. Make plans to revisit this study in a few weeks to review your growing faith.

Things to Pray About

6. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are books that focus on preparedness for Jesus' eventual return, but also on how to live in the meanwhile. As you reflect on what it means to be ready for Jesus—in both the now and the not yet—ask God for guidance and direction so you can be a good example for others.

7. The messages in 1 and 2 Thessalonians include trust, preparedness, diligence, patience, perseverance, maturing in your faith, and sharing God's good news. Spend time praying for each of these topics.

8. Whether you've been studying this in a small group or on your own, there are many other Christians working through the very same issues you discovered when examining 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Take time to pray for each of them, that God would reveal truth, that the Holy Spirit would guide you, and that each person might grow in spiritual maturity according to God's will.

A Blessing of Encouragement

Studying the Bible is one of the best ways to learn how to be more like Christ. Thanks for taking this step. In closing, let this blessing precede you and follow you into the next week while you continue to marinate in God's Word:

May God light your path to greater understanding as you review the truths found in the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians and consider how they can help you grow closer to Christ.

THE WIERSBE BIBLE STUDY SERIES: 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Published by David C Cook
4050 Lee Vance View
Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

David C Cook Distribution Canada
55 Woodslee Avenue, Paris, Ontario, Canada N3L 3E5

David C Cook U.K., Kingsway Communications
Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6NT, England

The graphic circle C logo is a registered trademark of David C Cook.

All rights reserved. Except for brief excerpts for review purposes,
no part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form
without written permission from the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this study are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. Scripture quotations marked kjv are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. (Public Domain.)

In the *Be Ready* excerpts, unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. (Public Domain.) Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission (www.Lockman.com); NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.; PH are taken from J. B. Phillips: *The New Testament in Modern English*, revised editions © J. B. Phillips, 1958, 1960, 1972, permission of Macmillan Publishing Co. and Collins Publishers; The author has added italics to Scripture quotations for emphasis.

All excerpts taken from *Be Ready*, second edition, published by David C Cook in 2010 © 1979 Warren W. Wiersbe, ISBN 978-1-4347-6501-7.

LCCN 2013949929
ISBN 978-0-7814-1036-6
eISBN 978-0-7814-1122-6

© 2013 Warren W. Wiersbe

The Team: Steve Parolini, Karen Lee-Thorp, Amy Konyndyk, Nick Lee, Tonya Osterhouse, Karen Athen

Series Cover Design: John Hamilton Design

Cover Photo: iStockphoto

First Edition 2013

An internationally renowned Bible teacher, **Dr. Warren W. Wiersbe** has written more than 160 books, including the popular “BE” series of Bible commentaries. He and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Visit DCCeBooks.com for more great reads.

