PERSPECTIVE

Gaining a proper perspective of God, ourselves, and the world in which we live

A Study of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians

MELANIE NEWTON
We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many women who served as contributors to this study guide, especially Joan Floyd and Robin Colley. Without your help, we would never have accomplished this monumental task in a timely manner. Thanks also to all those who served as editors for the lessons. Your work is much appreciated.

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Melanie Newton is a Lifestyle Disciplemaking speaker, author, and trainer with Joyful Walk Ministries. She is the author of *Graceful Beginnings* books for anyone new to the Bible and *Joyful Walk Bible Studies* for growing Christians. Melanie can be contacted at melanienewton.com.

We pray that you and your group will find *Perspective* a resource that God will use to strengthen you in your faith walk with Him.
MELANIE NEWTON

Melanie Newton is a Louisiana girl who made the choice to follow Jesus while attending LSU. She and her husband Ron married and moved to Texas for him to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. They stayed in Texas where Ron led a wilderness camping ministry for troubled youth for many years. Ron now helps corporations with their challenging employees and is the author of the top-rated business book, No Jerks on the Job.

Melanie jumped into raising three Texas-born children and serving in ministry to women at her church. Through the years, the Lord has given her opportunity to do Bible teaching and to write grace-based Bible studies for women that are now available from her website (melanienewton.com) and on Bible.org. Graceful Beginnings books are for anyone new to the Bible. Joyful Walk Bible Studies are for maturing Christians.

Melanie is currently a disciplemaking trainer with Joyful Walk Ministries. She equips and encourages Christian women everywhere to pursue a lifestyle of disciplemaking. Her heart’s desire is to encourage you to have a joyful relationship with Jesus Christ so you are willing to share that experience with others around you.

“Jesus took hold of me in 1972, and I’ve been on this great adventure ever since. My life is a gift of God, full of blessings in the midst of difficult challenges. The more I’ve learned and experienced God’s absolutely amazing grace, the more I’ve discovered my faith walk to be a joyful one. I’m still seeking that joyful walk every day...”

Melanie
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Profiles of Perseverance: Old Testament Men
Live Out His Love: New Testament Women
Radical Acts: Adventure with the Spirit from the Book of Acts
Knowing Jesus, Knowing Joy: A Study of Philippians
Healthy Living: A Study of Colossians
Adorn Yourself with Godliness: A Study of 1 Timothy and Titus
Perspective: A Study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians
To Be Found Faithful: A Study of 2 Timothy

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Using This Study Guide

This study guide consists of 12 lessons covering two of Paul’s letters—First and Second Thessalonians. If you cannot do the entire lesson one week, please read the Bible passage covered by the lesson.

**The Basic Study**

Each lesson includes core questions covering the passage narrative. These core questions will take you through the process of inductive Bible study—observation, interpretation, and application. The process is more easily understood in the context of answering these questions:

- What does the passage say? (Observation: what’s actually there)
- What does it mean? (Interpretation: the author’s intended meaning)
- How does this apply to me today? (Application: making it personal)

Questions identified as "Gaining Perspective" lead you to introspection and application of a specific truth to your life.

**Study Enhancements**

To aid in proper interpretation and application of the study, five additional study aids are located where appropriate in the lesson:

- Historical Insights
- Scriptural Insights
- From the Greek (definitions of Greek words)
- Focus on the Meaning
- Think About It (thoughtful reflection)

**New Testament Summary**

The New Testament opens with the births of John and Jesus. About 30 years later, John challenged the Jews to indicate their repentance (turning from sin and toward God) by submitting to water baptism—a familiar Old Testament practice used for repentance as well as when a Gentile converted to Judaism (to be washed clean of idolatry).

Jesus, God's incarnate Son, publicly showed the world what God is like and taught His perfect ways for 3 – 3½ years. After preparing 12 disciples to continue Christ's earthly work, He died voluntarily on a cross for mankind's sin, rose from the dead, and returned to heaven. The account of His earthly life is recorded in 4 books known as the Gospels (the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John named after the compiler of each account).

After Jesus’ return to heaven, the followers of Christ were then empowered by the Holy Spirit and spread God's salvation message among the Jews, a number of whom believed in Christ. The apostle Paul and others carried the good news to the Gentiles during 3 missionary journeys (much of this recorded in the book of Acts). Paul wrote 13 New Testament letters to churches & individuals (Romans through Philemon). The section in our Bible from Hebrews to Jude contains 8 additional letters penned by five men, including two apostles (Peter and John) and two of Jesus’ half-brothers (James and Jude). The author of Hebrews is unknown. The apostle John also recorded Revelation, which summarizes God's final program for the world. The Bible ends as it began—with a new, sinless creation.
DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Attend consistently** whether your lesson is done or not. You’ll learn from the other women, and they want to get to know you.

2. **Set aside time** to work through the study questions. The goal of Bible study is to **get to know** Jesus. He will change your life.

3. **Share your insights** from your personal study time. As you spend time in the Bible, Jesus will teach you truth through His Spirit inside you.

4. **Respect each other’s insights.** Listen thoughtfully. Encourage each other as you interact. Refrain from dominating the discussion if you have a tendency to be talkative. 😊

5. **Celebrate our unity** in Christ. Avoid bringing up controversial subjects such as politics, divisive issues, and denominational differences.

6. **Maintain confidentiality.** Remember that anything shared during the group time is not to leave the group (unless permission is granted by the one sharing).

7. **Pray for one another** as sisters in Christ.

8. **Get to know the women** in your group. Please do not use your small group members for solicitation purposes for home businesses, though.

GAINING PERSPECTIVE

"Perspective" — a measured or objective assessment of a situation, giving all aspects their comparative importance

Through your study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, you will gain a proper perspective of God, yourself, and the world in which you live. Proper perspective gives you stability, certainty, and confidence in your God who is faithful to you.

You will grow in confidence because you will learn that your self-worth is not derived from any human being but from God. You will be able to stand firm and press onward regardless of obstacles in your life.

Each woman is unique. There is no one exactly like you or me in all the world. Each of us is influential in the sphere God has given to us in which to make an impact—our family, workplace, school, church, and neighborhood. For that reason, each of us is responsible to God for how we use the gifts and opportunities He has given us. Each of us will stand before Him individually as a woman.

When we gain a proper perspective of God, ourselves, and the world in which we live, we begin to serve our God with greater enthusiasm and growing freedom. There is then no limit to what can happen as God works in us and through us to impact our world.

How is your perspective?

*Enjoy your Joyful Walk Bible Study!*
Introduction to 1st and 2nd Thessalonians

Historical Background
Thessalonica was originally an ancient town named Thermai, meaning “Hot Springs.” In time, it became an important city because of its strategic location near the Aegean Sea. In the Roman Empire, it became the capital of the province of Macedonia and its largest city with 200,000 people. Thessalonica stood on the Via Egnatia, the Roman highway to the East, making it an important city of commerce. In Paul’s day, it was a self-governing community with enough Jews in residence to warrant a synagogue (Acts 17:1).

On his second missionary journey while Paul was in Troas, God showed him a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, “Come over and help us.” Paul and Silas went, stopping first at Philippi, where they preached, and a church was formed. After spending a night in prison for driving an evil spirit from a girl, Paul and Silas were forced to leave Philippi. They went down the road to Thessalonica. For at least three Sabbath days Paul reasoned in the synagogue with those present, and many believed the gospel. However, he probably ministered in Thessalonica for a longer time than just three weeks in view of what he wrote that he had done there. Those who responded to the message of Christ’s sufferings and resurrection were Jews and God-fearing Greeks. There were also some leading women of the city and many idol-worshipping pagans.

This angered a group of unbelieving Jews who then stirred up a gang of roughnecks to attack the house of Jason where Paul and his friends had been staying. Unable to find the missionaries, the mob dragged Jason before the magistrates who simply commanded him to keep the peace. Convinced of the danger for Paul and Jason, the Christians sent Paul and Silas away from the city by night to nearby Berea.

Paul and his party began their evangelistic work in Berea in the synagogue, as was their custom. However, when many Jews there believed, the Thessalonian Jews came down to Berea and stirred up more trouble. The Berean Christians sent Paul away to Athens, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. Having been sent for by Paul, Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Athens, but he soon sent Silas back to Philippi and or Berea, and Timothy back to Thessalonica. Later both men returned to Paul while he was in Corinth with a financial gift from the Christians in those Macedonian towns.

Purpose for the Letters
Timothy’s report of conditions in the Thessalonian church led Paul to write the first letter shortly after he arrived in Corinth about A.D. 51. Some of the Thessalonians apparently believed that Jesus Christ was about to return momentarily and had consequently given up their jobs and had become disorderly. Some worried about what had happened to their loved ones who had died before the Lord had returned. Persecution from the Gentiles as well as the Jews still oppressed the believers who were nevertheless holding fast to the truth and eager to see Paul again. Some outside the church, however, remained hostile to Paul. There also appears that some within the church had returned to their former habits involving sexual impurity.

It seems that Paul had at least three purposes in mind when he wrote 1 Thessalonians. First, he wanted to encourage the Christians in Thessalonica who were making good progress in their new faith. Second, he desired to correct misinformation about himself and his fellow missionaries that some of his critics in Thessalonica were circulating. Third, he wrote to give additional instruction that would contribute to the Thessalonians’ spiritual growth.
Upon receiving back news about the Thessalonian church, Paul wrote the second letter perhaps within a few months of the first one. Some of the news was good. The majority of the Thessalonians were continuing to grow and to remain faithful to Christ in spite of persecution. Unfortunately, some of the news was bad. False teaching concerning the day of the Lord had entered the church and was causing confusion and leading some of the Christians to quit their jobs in expectation of the Lord’s imminent return. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to commend his children in the faith for their growth and faithfulness, to correct the doctrinal error about the day of the Lord, and to warn the idle to get back to work.

Far and away the largest theological contribution of both 1 and 2 Thessalonians lies in what they say about eschatology. Over a quarter of 1 Thessalonians and nearly half of 2 Thessalonians deal with problems and issues regarding the parousia or coming of Christ from heaven.

“Then the Thessalonian letters present the first literary evidence for the use of parousia . . . in the sense of the future Advent of Christ: it occurs in this sense six times in the two letters. The event is depicted repeatedly in language borrowed from portrayals of OT theophanies. But it is the ethical implications that are chiefly stressed: the writers look forward to the Parousia especially as the time when their service will be reviewed and rewarded by the Lord who commissioned them, and they will be content, they say, to have it assessed by the quality of their converts.” (F. F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, p. 38)
INTRODUCTION

Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians (NIV 2011)

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so, you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way, they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For
what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

So, when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones.

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you His Holy Spirit.

Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so much more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and
persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day, we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God’s people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
Paul’s Second Letter to the Thessalonians (NIV 2011)

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness[a] is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.
May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching[a] you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”

We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.

Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.
LESSON ONE

1: The Living and True God

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Historical Insight

Thessalonica was originally an ancient town named Thermai, meaning “Hot Springs.” In time, it became an important city because of its strategic location near the Aegean Sea. In the Roman Empire, it became the capital of the province of Macedonia and its largest city with 200,000 people. Thessalonica stood on the Via Egnatia, the Roman highway to the East, making it an important city of commerce. In Paul’s day, it was a self-governing community with enough Jews in residence to warrant a synagogue (Acts 17:1).

On his second missionary journey while Paul was in Troas, God showed him a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, “Come over and help us.” Paul and Silas went, stopping first at Philippi, where they preached, and a church was formed. After spending a night in prison for driving an evil spirit from a girl, Paul and Silas were forced to leave Philippi. They went down the road to Thessalonica. For at least three Sabbath days, Paul reasoned in the synagogue with those present, and many believed the gospel. However, he probably ministered in Thessalonica for a longer time than just three weeks in view of what he wrote that he had done there. Those who responded to the message of Christ’s sufferings and resurrection were Jews and God-fearing Greeks. There were also some leading women of the city and many idol-worshipping pagans.

This angered a group of unbelieving Jews who then stirred up a gang of roughnecks to attack the house of Jason where Paul and his friends had been staying. Unable to find the missionaries, the mob dragged Jason before the magistrates who simply commanded him to keep the peace. Convinced of the danger for Paul and Jason, the Christians sent Paul and Silas away from the city by night to nearby Berea.

Paul and his party began their evangelistic work in Berea in the synagogue, as was their custom. However, when many Jews there believed, the Thessalonian Jews came down to Berea and stirred up more trouble. The Berean Christians sent Paul away to Athens, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. Having been sent for by Paul, Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Athens, but he soon sent Silas back to Philippi and or Berea, and Timothy back to Thessalonica. Later both men returned to Paul while he was in Corinth with a financial gift from the Christians in those Macedonian towns.

Timothy’s report of conditions in the Thessalonian church led Paul to write the first letter shortly after he arrived in Corinth about A.D. 51.

This lesson will involve more reading and time devoted to the text than the other lessons in the study as you will be reading through the entire letter of 1 Thessalonians (only 5 chapters long in our Bible form). That is the best way to see the entire message and get the “big picture” before we divide it into smaller pieces to enjoy it more slowly.
1. Before reading the letter, read Acts 17:1-15. What information is given about Paul’s experience there and the newly formed church?

Paul wrote this epistle only months after leaving Thessalonica so these events and people will be fresh in his mind.

2. Read Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians as it was intended—a letter from one dear friend to another, read at one sitting. A copy of the letter (NIV translation) is included in this study guide before this lesson. As you read, mark anything that is of interest to you as well as key themes in the letter.

3. Look back at what you marked.
   - What did you see that really interested you?
   - What key themes did you see in the letter?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

4. Paul often greets the churches with the words "grace and peace." What is the connection between these two words? See Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 5:1-2.
Focus on the Meaning: “Grace” was a common Greek salutation that meant “greeting” or “rejoice.” “Peace” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “shalom” meaning “favor,” “well-being,” and “prosperity in the widest sense,” especially prosperity in spiritual matters. Paul used both words when he greeted the recipients of his epistles. God’s grace is the basis for and leads to our peace. (Constable’s Notes on 1 Thessalonians, p. 5)

5. From these first 10 verses, what would you say is the tone/mood of Paul's letter?

6. Although no church is perfect, there are definite marks of maturity Paul emphasizes when commending a church. What characteristics of this church does Paul commend in v. 3?

Scriptural Insight: “These three Christian virtues—faith, love, and hope—occupied a large place in early analyses of Christian responsibility. The expectation was that in every life faith would work (Gal 5:6; James 2:18), love would labor (Rev 2:2, 4), and hope would endure (Rom 5:2-4; 8:24, 25). This threefold balance probably arose even before Paul’s doctrinal stance had matured and perhaps came from the teachings of Christ himself.” (Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians.” In Ephesians-Philemon. Vol. 11 of The Expositor’s Bible Commentary.)

7. Search the passage for specific results of each characteristic and record them!

- Faith —
- Love —
- Hope —

8. Reread verses 4 and 5. Discuss the assurances Paul gives to the Thessalonians. See also Acts 17:2-4.
9. So, how did this guide Paul in ministering to these young believers? After all, who is really in charge?

10. In verse 5, the Thessalonians are reminded about the character and reputation of Paul and his companions. Reread Acts 17:1-10. Describe Paul and his companions in the context of their stay in Thessalonica.

11. According to 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10, how had the Thessalonians imitated Paul and his companions?

12. **Gaining Perspective:** Like the Thessalonian believers...
   - Of whom are we to be imitators?

   - What principles should be guiding us in imitating others? See Ephesians 5:1-2 and 1 Timothy 4:12.

   - What kind of example are you providing for those around you to imitate?

*From the Greek:* The word *exechetai*, translated “rang out” or “echoed,” could be rendered “reverberated.” Paul saw the Thessalonians as amplifiers or relay stations that not only received the gospel message but sent it farther on its way with increased power and scope...The Thessalonians had acted as relay runners by passing the gospel they had heard on to farther places. They were a missionary church. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, p. 692; *Constable’s Notes on 1 Thessalonians*, p. 8)
13. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. Verse 9 gives us the perfect definition of repentance—to change one's mind. About what did the Thessalonians change their mind?

14. They turned to and encountered the **living and true God**. Describe how it impacted their daily lives.

*Historical Insight:* “The fact that God is a living Person was precious to the Jews and to Paul; this is the characteristic by which God is most often distinguished from so-called gods in the Old Testament. He is the only loving God; all other gods are not alive and therefore not worthy objects of worship.” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament, p. 692)

15. **Gaining Perspective:**
   - When you first believed, about what did you change your mind?
   - How has your life altered since encountering the **living and true God**?
   - Has your life impacted others in your sphere of influence?

16. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. Verse 10 says that another aspect of our faith is waiting for Jesus' return. What evidence do we have that Jesus is indeed returning? See Acts 1:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.

*Think About It:* “Believers live anticipating a coronation (2 Timothy 4:8) rather than a condemnation.” (Constable’s Notes on 1 Thessalonians, p. 9)
17. Contrast the hope of the believers with the fate of the unbelievers when He returns. See Colossians 3:3-4, 6; John 3:18; John 3:36; and Romans 8:1.

- Hope of the believers —

- Fate of the unbelievers —

18. **Gaining Perspective:** How is this first chapter of 1 Thessalonians an encouragement to you?

In the space below, consider using a creative means (poem, song, drawing, prayer) to illustrate what has happened to your life since encountering the living and true God.
2: Heart Attitude of a Servant

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

1. Write down the various references to the “source” of Paul’s message (“gospel of God”, verse 2).

2. From whom did Paul get his authority and message?

   **Historical Insight:** There was apparently a large conspiracy to attack the character of Paul, Silas (Sylvanus), and Timothy regarding their visit to Thessalonica. (Reminder: Acts 17:1-11 records this visit.) Paul’s defense is his conduct!

3. List the various “accusations” Paul is defending in this passage.

   **Summarize that “rumors” that were possibly being spread about Paul and his companions:**

4. Now, explain in practical terms how the conduct of Paul, Silas and Timothy defended each of these accusations.
5. Read Acts 16:16-40. In 1 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul refers to this event. Why would his having been persecuted in Philippi be a factor in his defense of the accusations in Thessalonica?


7. **Gaining Perspective:** The common reaction, then and now: “If you can’t refute the message, attack the messenger” and his/her motivations.
   - Have you ever been “attacked” in such a way?
   - Contrary to our normal reaction, how should we respond, and why?

8. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Paul refers to Timothy, Silas, and himself as being “approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel”. (Vines Expository Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians says the phrase means “found to have stood the test.”) Use the following verses to discover how each was “approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel.”
   - Timothy (Acts 16:1-2; Philippians 2:19-22) —
     - Silas (Acts 15:22,40; 1 Peter 5:12) —
     - Paul (Acts 9:1-16; 13:1-3; Galatians 1:15) —
9. Clearly state the "gospel"—pure and simple—with which they were entrusted? Read Acts 17:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 plus any other verses to support your answer.

10. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Verse 4 says that it is God “who examines our hearts.” In effect, Paul is saying God examines every part of our being. From the following references, discover that the heart is the seat of many things. What are they?

- Matthew 9:4 —
- Mark 2:6 —
- Mark 11:23 —
- John 12:40 —
- John 16:22 —
- Acts 2:37 —
- Romans 6:17 —
- Romans 9:2 —
- Romans 10:10 —
- 2 Corinthians 9:7 —
- Colossians 3:15 —
- Hebrews 4:12 —

**Summary:**
11. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12. Paul, Timothy and Silas take on the roles of both mother and father in v. 7-12. Explain how they exemplify a “mother.”

12. How do they exemplify a “father?” See also 1 Corinthians 4:14-21.

13. How is their conduct different from the commonly displayed actions/attitudes of one who could have imposed a burden on them as stated in v. 7? See Philippians 2:6-7 as well.

**Historical Insight:** Paul denied any desire to get rich from his preaching. Itinerant philosophers and orators were common in the Roman Empire. Paul had little in common with their motivation. He had come to Thessalonica to give, not to get. Furthermore, he did not demand that the Thessalonians acquiesce to his message because of his apostolic authority. However, Paul gave himself, not just his message, to the Thessalonians out of love for them, not for personal gain. In this Paul followed the tradition of Jewish rabbis for whom receiving money for teaching the Law was considered shameful. The measure of his love was the toil and trouble he expended as he worked constantly, probably making tents and other leather articles, so he would not be a burden to them. Paul was by trade a leather-worker. This is how he and his companions had heralded the gospel among them. See Philippians 4:16 and 2 Corinthians 11:7-11. (Constable’s Notes on 1 Thessalonians, p. 12-13)

14. From vv. 1-12, we have a beautiful, clear presentation of the “heart attitude of a minister/servant”. Describe this heart attitude in your own words. (Note: the opposite of this is found in Titus 1:10-16!)

15. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Read Ezekiel 34:1-16. Discuss God’s distinction between false shepherds and true shepherds.
16. **Gaining Perspective:** What is your heart attitude towards those you serve, and where do you need to improve?

17. What ultimately is Paul’s goal?

18. What do you think this means? Examine the following verses for help:
   - Colossians 1:10 —
   - 1 Peter 1:15 —
   - 1 Peter 4:11 —

**Summary:**

**Think About It:** “Few temptations assail the preacher more strongly than this one to please men, even if God is not pleased, though with the dim hope that God will after all condone or overlook. Nothing but experience will convince some preachers how fickle is popular favour and how often it is at the cost of failure to please God.” (*Constable’s Notes on 1 Thessalonians*, p. 12)

19. **Gaining Perspective:** Just as Paul, we are called to be faithful to God and to please Him and not men. What gets in your way of doing this? How can we help one another to be faithful? Read Hebrews 10:23-25.
20. With God as “the examiner of their hearts” (v. 4), what kind of behavior did Paul and his companions display toward the Thessalonians?

21. **Gaining Perspective:** God, as the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17), can produce such a heart in you if you seek it. Read your summary of the heart attitude of a servant again and remember who is Paul’s source ... and yours ... for courage, character and proper conduct. Keeping this in mind, think of one person you can nurture this week as Paul nurtured his disciples.
3: Stress of Persecution

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20.

1. Looking at verses 14-15, what were the Thessalonians experiencing?

2. Power in leadership is the ability to define a situation, attitude, or goal. Followers ask their leader, "How do I think about this situation?" How does Paul answer this question for them?

3. Reviewing 1 Thessalonians 2:1, Paul says that His coming to Thessalonica was not in vain. List the evidence of this in verses 13-20. (Also read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 and 3:6-8.)

4. In 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, Paul tells the Thessalonians that they have become imitators of other churches of God in Judea, and of Jesus Christ, by their suffering. What emotions and reactions often occur when a person is under persecution?
5. Read the following verses and list the possible “benefits” of persecution or suffering (if any).

- 2 Corinthians 1:6-10 —

- 1 Peter 4:12-19 —

- James 1:2-4 —

   **Think About It:** Christian author John C. Maxwell said, “A faith that has not been tested cannot be trusted.” Do you agree or disagree?

6. Summarize how Paul’s writing of “fellow-suffering” would be an encouragement to the Thessalonians?

7. **Gaining Perspective:** As believers in Christ today...

   - In what ways do we experience “persecutions?”

   - Looking at how Paul encouraged the Thessalonians, what is his encouragement to us as well?

8. List the specific accusations Paul makes against the Jews in vv. 15-16.

   **Think About It:** “An unbeliever who is willing to live and let live with respect to personal convictions regarding God is less dangerous than one who not only disbelieves himself but also tries to keep others from hearing the gospel. The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica were of the latter variety.” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, p. 696)
9. Paul can speak of this first-hand, not just as a recipient of their persecution, but also as a once active participant. Read about Paul in the following verses and write down his credentials and past activity.


- Acts 26:10-11 —

- Philippians 3:4-6 —

10. Summarize what happened to change Paul as you read of his account before King Agrippa in Acts 26:12-23. Also read Philippians 3:7-11.

11. Read Romans 9:1-5 and 10:1. Did Paul’s condemnation for the activity of these Jews come from personal hatred towards them? Explain your answer. What was his desire for all men?

**Scriptural Insight:** The Thessalonians’ opponents seem to have been mainly Jews. Paul desperately wanted unbelieving Jews to come to faith in Christ (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1). Yet they were some of his most antagonistic persecutors (2 Cor. 11:24, 26). Their actions were not pleasing to God and were not in the best interests of all men who need to hear the gospel. By their opposition the enemies of the gospel added more transgressions on their own heads with the result that they hastened God’s judgment of them. God had already focused His wrath on them for their serious sin. They not only rejected the gospel themselves, but they also discouraged others from accepting it. It was only a matter of time before God would pour out His wrath in judgment. In view of the eschatological emphasis of the letter, Paul seems to be alluding primarily to the judgment coming on unbelievers during the Tribulation. This is the only place in his inspired writings where Paul charged “the Jews” with the death of Jesus. Elsewhere in the New Testament, it is the sins of all people that were responsible. Therefore, Paul was just identifying a segment of humanity that was responsible. He was not blaming the Jews in some special sense for Jesus’ death. *(Constable’s Notes on 1 Thessalonians, p. 15)*
12. **Gaining Perspective:** Lest we become prideful, who else was responsible for the persecution and death of Jesus Christ? Read Isaiah 53:4-6 and Hebrews 2:9 slowly and carefully. Meditate on these passages and write down what they mean to you personally.

13. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20. Paul refers to being "torn away" or "separated" from them. The meaning of the original Greek word used here is "to be orphaned." In what other terms you have already studied has Paul expressed a "family" relationship to these believers?

14. What is the “bottom line” for Paul? In other words, why does he keep doing what he is doing? Be specific.

15. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** In v. 18, Paul blames Satan for stopping him more than once from revisiting the Thessalonians. Research Acts 17:6-9 to find one possible way Satan hindered Paul from returning. (Think legal!) Jesus knew the reality of Satan at work in the world to hinder people from believing in God. Discuss Jesus' comments in John 8:37-44 in light of what Paul experienced in Thessalonica.
4: Stand Firm

1 Thessalonians 3:1-9

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-9.

1. For understanding these verses, refer back to Acts 17:13-16 and 18:5. Timothy and Silas brought back news about the church in Thessalonica. Paul was both excited and grateful for the good news which relieved his deep concern for them. Discuss his heartfelt concern.

2. How had Paul tried to prepare the Thessalonians while he was with them?

3. Why was Timothy sent back to them? Read also 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

Scriptural Insight: Often new believers, and even older believers, interpret difficulty as a sign that they need to change something. Timothy reminded them that persecution is a normal experience for the Christian (Matt. 5:11-12; 10:16-28; 20:22-23; 24:9-10), just as Paul had previously instructed them. (Constable’s Notes on 1 Thessalonians, p. 19)

4. What good news did Timothy bring to Paul?

5. How did this news encourage Paul's minister's heart?
6. **Gaining Perspective:** This letter reveals the heart of a minister. Paul lays bare his concern for the young Thessalonian believers even when he was away from them, actively planting new churches. Is there anyone to whom you are ministering long distance? How are you maintaining your heart's concern for that person? In what ways are you able to continue ministering to her/him?

7. Read the following verses to explain what Paul means when he refers in verse 3 to believers being destined for trials/afflictions.
   - John 15:18-25—
   - Acts 9:15-16—
   - Philippians 1:29-30—
   - 2 Timothy 3:12—

   **Summary:**

8. Read the following verses to answer this question, “What is to be a believer’s response to harsh treatment?”
   - Romans 12:14, 17-21—
   - Psalm 143—
9. Describe how one believer ministers to another who is undergoing trials or persecution. Think through Paul's words in verses 6-7. See also 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 7:5-7.

10. **Gaining Perspective:** You may not be undergoing persecution or harsh treatment at the moment. Yet, as a member of the Body of Christ, you should hurt when another part of the Body is hurting. Read 1 Corinthians 12:25-27. Are you aware of other members of the Body who are being persecuted? How can you minister to someone else who is experiencing such treatment now? Review Paul's purpose for sending Timothy back to Thessalonica. Does this give you any ideas?


12. In what ways might the tempter have tempted the Thessalonian believers so that Paul's ministry to them would have been in vain? See also 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 17-18.

13. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** How does a believer overcome temptation from the tempter? Use your Bible’s cross-references and study notes. Write a short summary.
14. Why is it not necessary to face temptation alone? Read Hebrews 4:14-16.

15. In 1 Thessalonians 3:8, Paul describes a feeling of really living (NIV) or being alive again (NET). What do you think he means? See also 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 and Philippians 2:1-2.

16. **Gaining Perspective:** Ministers are to share the gospel and make disciples of the new believers. Then, disciples are to grow in their faith and then make more disciples who can then make disciples. Where are you in the "growth" process? In what ways have you been challenged to become more than a disciple? More than a servant to even ministering to others? If you are involved in ministry already, how can you identify with Paul's attitude?
5: Perfecting Faith

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13.

1. Reviewing from the last lesson, what was Paul’s primary concern regarding the Thessalonians?

2. Why did Paul want to return to Thessalonica?

3. What is faith? First, define it in your own words. Then, compose a biblical definition. See Hebrews 11:1 plus other verses you find using cross-references or a concordance.

4. Read the entire chapter of Hebrews 11—a fabulous study of faith. How does God describe those who have lived by faith in Him?

**From the Greek:** The Greek word *pistis* translated “faith” means “a firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing.” It involves trust and trustworthiness, assurance. Biblical faith is a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgement of God’s revelation or truth followed by a personal surrender to Him. (*Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 222)
5. Why do you think the condition of the Thessalonians' faith was so important to Paul? Read also Hebrews 11:6 and Ephesians 6:16.


7. From these verses, who is able to perfect the faith of anyone? Read also Philippians 1:6 and Hebrews 12:1-3.

8. **Gaining Perspective**: Have you ever felt, or perhaps you now feel, that your faith is lacking something? What practical steps can you take to change the situation? Remember, though, it is not the size of your faith that counts but the *object* of your faith.

9. Paul's work of evangelism had been effective. Paul could have been "puffed up" by success. Why do you think he was able to remain humble about his tremendously effective evangelistic work?

10. **Gaining Perspective**: God may be using you in ministry. How do you keep from getting "puffed up" about your work, particularly if it seems to be effective? What counsel would you give to someone who has an attitude of self-importance regarding her/his ministry?
11. In 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 and 3:10-11, Paul expresses his longing (literally “passionate, intense longing”) to be with the new church again. What is Paul asking God to do?

12. How do you know Paul was willing to wait for the Lord's timing?

13. **Gaining Perspective:** When you desperately want something that seems out of your reach, what is your typical reaction? Do you ever allow God to “clear the way” for you in His own perfect timing? Explain your answer. See also 1 Peter 5:6 and Philippians 4:6.

14. In 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, Paul prays a beautiful, heartfelt prayer for the new church at Thessalonica. For what does he specifically pray?

**Scriptural Insight:** It is evident from Paul's writings that a very large part of his private life was occupied in prayer and thanksgiving. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, p. 699)

15. Regarding love, what do you think he means by "increase and overflow/abound?" Read 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 John 4:7-12.

**Think About It:** This kind of love was described by the late author, Francis Schaeffer, as "the mark of the Christian."

15. If God is strengthening our hearts in holiness, how should this look in our daily lives?
16. **Gaining Perspective**: Paul's prayer is also a powerful example of how we ought to pray for one another. Pray as Paul did in these verses for your family, friends, and church today and as often as God brings it to your mind.
6: Pleasing God in Our Sexuality

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.

1. Reread 1 Thessalonians 4:1.
   - What was to be their goal?

   - Is this to be our goal in life today?

   - Do you truly believe this? If not, why not?

Think About It: The Christian life is not a set of rules to be obeyed or a list of prohibitions to avoid; it is the outworking of a loving desire to please God who chose us. ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament, p. 700)

2. From what we have learned so far in Thessalonians, describe a life that is lived in order to please God. Use specific verses to support your answer.

3. From 1 Thessalonians 1:9, we learned that repentance means “to change one’s mind.” The Thessalonians changed their minds about whom they worshipped—from idols to the living and true God. Paul said that their lives changed as well—from self-dependency and self-sufficiency to Christ-dependency and Christ-sufficiency. How is such change possible? Research the following verses plus any other verses you can find.
   - John 15:5 —

   - 2 Corinthians 10:5 —
• Romans 12:1-2 —

• Galatians 2:20 —

• Ephesians 2:1-5, 8-10 —

• Other verses —

**Summarize:**

4. **Gaining Perspective:** Whom are you living to please? If you have chosen to live in order to please God, what is the evidence in your life? If you have not previously chosen to live to please God but choose to do so now, apply the scriptures given above and trust God to make the necessary changes in your life through His Holy Spirit.

5. As believers, we sometimes fret because we can't figure out God's will on some matter in our lives. Yet, He has given us specific direction about a great many things. Discuss what is declared with *certainty* to be God's will in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. Does God say what He wants?
Focus on the Meaning: The term sanctification sounds important but unintelligible. It refers to being "set apart for the Lord." It can also mean "made holy." God Himself sanctifies us:
(1) through our position in Christ—being declared "holy" by the work of the Holy Spirit through our faith in Christ’s atoning death on the cross (1 Corinthians 6:11), and
(2) through our ongoing relationship with Christ—being made holy by the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians (1 Thessalonians 3:13). This influences conduct.

6. Looking at verses 4 and 5, contrast learning how to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable as opposed to acting in passionate lust, a characteristic of those who do not display in their lives that they know God (the heathen).

From the Greek: The Greek word ktaomai, translated as “control” or “possess” in verse 4 means “to procure for oneself, acquire, obtain.” It carried the idea of gaining mastery over something. (Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, p. 477)

7. It is often said that holiness and sexual immorality are mutually exclusive. Do you agree? Why or why not?

8. Paul is writing to believers who have already been declared holy by their position in Christ. His teaching is now referring to their future conduct. Discuss the significance of believers being "set apart for the Lord" regarding sex. See also 1 Corinthians 6:13-20 and Ephesians 5:8-10.
9. Concerning God's design of sex, read the following verses to answer this question, “Does God say what He wants?”
   • Genesis 2:24-25 —
   • Proverbs 5:18-19 —
   • Hebrews 13:4 —
   • 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 —

   **Scriptural Insight:** "Physical love in marriage, symbolically uniting two personalities by the outward act of sexual intercourse, is beautiful in the eyes of God. And it is holy...The Song of Solomon is a very romantic book in which God communicates to us His delight in the wonderful relationship between a man and woman in marriage...God made us sexual beings. Marriage has been provided to satisfy such needs, and every scriptural prohibition has to do with sexual activity outside marriage. Don't let anyone tell you the Bible prohibits sex or represses your sexuality." (Influential Woman by Vickie Kraft, page 64-70)

10. What do you think Paul means by saying not to wrong, violate, or take advantage of a brother/sister in this area?

   **Scriptural Insight:** “Sexual immorality wrongs the partner in the forbidden act by involving him or her in behavior contrary to God's will and therefore under His judgment...The initiation of the act takes advantage of his [her] partner in sin by fanning the fire of passion till self-control is lost." (The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament, pp. 701-702)

11. What does God promise to do about it?
Think About It: The better translation for the end of verse 6 is "the Lord is the avenger/will avenge." What do you think this means? How would God avenge the wrong done by one believer to another? Have you seen this to be true with anyone who has been immoral? How?

12. As you have seen from today's passage, God takes a position on sex. Why do you think God cares?

13. Gaining Perspective: In the first century, moral standards were generally very low, and chastity was regarded as an unreasonable restriction. Sound familiar? According to recent surveys, the morality of Christians is not much different from that of nonChristians in the area of sex. Apply God's directive specifically to today's American society. To your daily life. To your home. To your children. Be specific.

14. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. All sin (past, present, and future) is forgiven the moment anyone trusts in Christ. Yet, the sin nature remains in our bodies as long as we live on this earth. Because we are not perfected, we will continue to sin both unintentionally and intentionally. Our sins are forgiven, but our God knows that continuing sinful behavior is not good for us and does not please Him. How does God deal with deliberate sin in a Christian's life? Read Hebrews 12:1-11.

Scriptural Insight: "The indwelling Holy Spirit has power enough to enable any Christian to learn how to control his own body, even in a pagan immoral climate. The exhortation is to avoid sexual immorality; the enablement comes from the Holy Spirit." (The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament, pp. 702)
15. Read the following verses to see the various functions of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.
   - John 14:16-17, 26 —
   - Romans 5:5 —
   - 2 Corinthians 1:22 —
   - Galatians 4:5-6 —
   - Titus 3:5 —
   - 1 John 3:24 —

16. **Gaining Perspective:** In light of what you studied so far in this chapter:
   - Apply verse 8 to your life.
   - What can you say to someone, especially a Christian, who says they don’t accept biblical standards because they don’t apply today?
7: Winning Respect of Outsiders

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12.

1. What do you learn from verse 9 about love?

Focus on the Greek: “Brotherly love” translates philadelphia, a Greek word that outside the NT almost without exception denoted the mutual love of children of the same father. In the new Testament, it always means love of fellow believers in Christ, all of whom have the same heavenly Father.” (The NIV Study Bible, p. 1824)

2. What do the following verses reveal about being “taught by God?”
   • Isaiah 54:13 —
   • John 6:45 —
   • 1 Corinthians 2:13 —

3. Gaining Perspective: What is God teaching you about loving fellow believers?

4. Read 1 Thessalonians 1 again. What did Paul know about the reputation of this body of believers?
5. In vv. 11-12, what further instruction is Paul giving to the Thessalonian church?

6. Define the term “ambition” (NIV) or “to aspire” (NET).

7. From 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, what is acceptable ambition for a believer? See also Ephesians 4:28

8. What do you think "to lead a quiet life" means? Describe it.

**Focus on the Meaning:** The word translated “quiet” means quiet in the sense of restfulness rather than quiet as opposed to talkativeness...Paul was telling the Thessalonians to be less frantic, not less exuberant. A person who is constantly on the move is frequently a bother to other people as well as somewhat distracted from his own walk with God...Such quietude constitutes a practical demonstration of love for others.” It is also used in 2 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Timothy 2:2-3; and 1 Peter 3:4. *(Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament, p. 703)*

9. What is the value of leading this kind of life?

10. How do we achieve a quiet life? Where does it start?
11. **Gaining Perspective:** If you are always tired and your life is hectic, what should you do to evaluate your personal "ambition" for your days? How do you influence your children or husband away from living a "quiet life?" Talk to God about this and ask Him to work in your heart first. Then, ask Him to direct you and your family.

12. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12. Discuss what it means to mind or attend to your own business. What is your own business?

13. How would minding your own business demonstrate brotherly love for other believers?

14. What would be the opposite of minding your own business?

14. **Gaining Perspective:** Are you tempted to meddle in other people’s lives? If so, do you recognize this as a distraction from your own walk with God as well as theirs?

15. In Paul’s culture, what do you think "work with your hands" means?
16. What would be the equivalent in today’s culture?

17. How would doing this demonstrate love for and benefit other believers? See verse 12, 1 Timothy 5:10 and Ephesians 4:28.

**Historical Insight:** The Greeks in general thought manual labor degrading and fit only for slaves. Christians took seriously the need for earning their own living, but some of the Thessalonians, perhaps as a result of their belief in the imminent return of Christ, were neglecting work and relying on others to support them. (NIV Study Bible, p. 1824)

The Greeks deplored manual labor and relegated it to slaves as much as possible. But the Jews held it in esteem; every Jewish boy was taught a trade regardless of his family’s wealth. Work itself is a blessing, and working with one’s hands should never be despised by Christians.” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament, p. 703)

18. How had Paul modeled this “working” for them? See 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

19. **Gaining Perspective:** How do you work with your hands to demonstrate love for and benefit others? Feel free to use any creative means (poem, song, drawing, craft) to describe this.
20. Looking at verse 12, why is it important to win the respect of outsiders (non-believers)?

21. **Gaining Perspective:** In what ways do you feel that you are leading a life that wins the respect of non-believers? Have non-believers noticed your lifestyle and were attracted to it? Were you able to share the gospel with someone who noticed you lived to please God with your life?

***Think About It:*** “...it was not Paul’s intent that the church disrupts society or overthrows governments. Rather, he encouraged Christians to be good citizens and exemplary members of their families and of their society but to do so in a manner consistent with the teachings of Christ. Only in this sense was the Pauline gospel intended to change society. It set out to change the individuals who made up society while awaiting that climactic event when the power of God would truly change the world forever.” (D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians. The New American Commentary series*, p. 138)
8: The Believer’s Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

1. After reading this passage, what general concerns of the Thessalonians was Paul addressing?

2. Paul described three groups of people in verses 13-15. Name the groups and differentiate between them.
   (1)
   (2)
   (3)

3. What does Paul mean when he talks about "the rest who have no hope?" See Ephesians 2:12 also.


**Scriptural Insight:** This is not sleep of the soul, however, because Paul wrote elsewhere that a Christian who is absent from his body is present with the Lord. It is rather the “sleep” of the body in the earth until it is resurrected, changed into a glorious body, and reunited with the soul. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, p. 703)
5. Read the following verses to gain understanding about what happens when a believer dies.
   - Philippians 1:20-23 —
   - Ecclesiastes 12:7 —
   - Romans 14:7-9 —

6. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:35-57. Paul is addressing the Thessalonians' specific assumed concern (verses 15-17) that Christians who have died would miss the Lord's gathering of believers. Paul gives us a glimpse of what will occur. From the two passages, summarize the general sequence of events that will happen.

   **Historical Insight:** "Early pagans thought of graveyards as the dwelling places of departed spirits, but they had no pleasant names for these places. The Latins cremated bodies and placed the ashes in urns set in niches. These niches looked like dovecotes, so they were called *columbaria*. But the Christians used the name *koimatarion*, from which we get *cemetery*. The *koimatarion* was the barracks of the soldiers. Thus, at death the believer falls asleep as at the sounding of Taps. But the angel will blow the trumpet of resurrection, just as the bugler sounds reveille. Then the dead in Christ will come out of the barracks of the dead, to be forever with their glorious Captain." (Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans Book VI*, p. 113)

7. The modern phrase "The Rapture" comes from the Latin *rapturo* which is translated "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Describe the experience of all believers upon meeting the Lord in the air. See also Philippians 3:21 and 1 John 3:2. Paul calls this our "blessed hope" in Titus 2:13.

9. **Gaining Perspective:** Doesn't that make you excited about what He has planned for you? Feel free to use any creative means (poem, prose, song, drawing, craft) to describe your anticipation of this glorious event.

10. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:35-57. To the Greek mind, the resurrection of the body was an absurd idea.
   - Check out the reaction to Paul's sermon in Athens in Acts 17:31-32.
   - Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 again. Why is the resurrection absolutely essential to the Christian faith?

11. Then, where does the believer go? Glean your answer from all the passages above as well as John 14:1-3.
12. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Contrast the Christian view of the afterlife and the dead with several other religions.

13. How would Paul's words have encouraged the Thessalonians?

14. **Gaining Perspective:** What have you learned from this lesson so far to give you assurance and comfort about death of a believer, including your own death?

15. Read 1 Peter 1:3-9. Discuss what is promised to believers.

16. **Gaining Perspective:** Discuss your willingness to trust God and be content not knowing when Christ will return but living as if it were today. See Matthew 24:36-42.
17. **Gaining Perspective:** Remember a time in your life when you had lost hope? This is what the Thessalonians were going through. What renewed your hope? Read Hebrews 6:17-20.

**Think About It:** The man who has lived and died in Christ is still in Christ even in death and will rise in Him. (William Barclay)

Read “Death—Swallowed Up in Victory!” on the next page for additional insight.
Death—Swallowed Up in Victory!

DEATH...tears come to our eyes, because we grieve, we sorrow, and we miss our loved ones. Are you afraid of death? Are you certain there is life after death? Do you wonder what happens to the spirit when it leaves the body? Where does it go? Is there a holding tank, a period of waiting, a purgatory, a time of testing to see if you are worthy to get into heaven? Do you think that you can't know that you are going to heaven until you die? If any of these questions concern you, I don't blame you for being afraid of death!

DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION

How did death become part of human existence? Contrary to popular scientific theory and teaching, it was not part of our original design. Adam and eve were created to live forever. They were given a perfect environment with total freedom and everything they needed with only one prohibition, "Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:17) You know the story. Satan tempted them, they ate, and they experienced death:

1) Spiritual death or separation from God occurred immediately. Every human being since is born separated from God.

2) Their bodies began to physically die that day also. It took 900 years to happen because they were so wonderfully made.

Since then death has been the expectation and experience of every human being and animal.

The Bible teaches in Romans 5:12 that sin entered into the world—the entire world, not just affecting mankind.

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned"

All calamities and illnesses are a result of sin having affected our world. What this means is that there was no death anywhere before Adam sinned! Otherwise, Jesus' death and resurrection to abolish death means nothing!! Your faith is in vain! Don't let so-called "science" steal that from you. Death is not nature's way of ridding itself of the unfit, as evolution teaches. Death is the penalty for sin—both physical and spiritual death.

In the Old Testament, God commanded an approach to him that constantly reminded his people of this truth. They had to come to worship him with a blood sacrifice. And every time they brought that animal, there was a visible demonstration that death was the penalty for sin. Something had to die; this animal was the substitute that died in their place. When Jesus began his public ministry, John the Baptist pointed to him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) Jesus' blood doesn't just cover sin but takes it away.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:9-10, "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus...who destroyed death...." Jesus Christ was the only sacrifice that God would accept. He hung on that cross. He took the full penalty of sin on his own person. He rose from the dead. If there were even one sin that could not be forgiven, he would still be in the grave. His sacrifice so satisfied God the judge that he could extend mercy to us who accept Jesus Christ as Savior. So, God's justice has not been violated. The penalty has been paid in full. That's why Jesus could say, "it is finished," a phrase that was stamped on a paid bill.
The writer of Hebrews said that “by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (Hebrews 2:14-15) Do you realize that fear of death is slavery? Such fear is bondage and is what Satan has held over us all these years.

When you trust Jesus Christ as your savior, God takes you out from under Satan's power, and Satan is rendered powerless toward you regarding death. That's what the word “destroy” means—to render powerless or inoperative. In this verse, it doesn't mean to annihilate. He, the devil, is still active, still alive. But we have been taken out of his control.

Therefore, we are no longer in bondage to death. Death for the believer should hold no terror because death for us is a doorway into glory. Death is the way that we just go home. The body decays and reunites with the earth. (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 8:55)

Death is part of God's grace because it abolishes this flesh of sin. But the soul leaves this "earthly tent." The nonphysical part of us—intellect, emotion, will and spirit if believer—is then separated from the body. We see this in Luke 8:55. The little girl's spirit had departed and now returned.

Now this is where we get into all kinds of conjecture and false teaching. Scripture teaches that the soul of a believer goes directly to the presence of the Lord.

“I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;" (Philippians 1:23)

"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8)

That sounds too easy, doesn't it? God makes the gospel easy for us to understand, but we stumble over its simplicity. The same thing is true about eternal life. People won't accept it as being that easy to understand.

So, let's explore the question, “What happens to the soul?” Sometimes it helps to ask the opposite question. What doesn't happen to it?

WHAT DOESN'T HAPPEN TO THE SOUL?

Not annihilation—the atheistic view.

The annihilation or atheistic view says there is no consciousness beyond this life. The soul ceases to exist the moment the body dies. Evolution supports this because it views life with no purpose in itself other than perpetuating changes in the species. There are too many verses that speak of eternal life to hold to this view. We'll just look at a few.

Jesus tells a parable in Luke 16:19-31 about a rich man who dies and goes to the place of the unrighteous dead. From there, he can see a man named Lazarus in the place of the righteous dead. He can speak to him. But, there is a gap between them that neither of them can cross. Though not specifically doctrinal, Jesus always taught truth. In this parable, Jesus teaches there is consciousness beyond this life.

Before Christ, all spirits went into a place called sheol (Hebrew term; hades in the Greek), which is sometimes translated “hell” in our modern translations but should not be so. Sheol is just the place of the dead. It was thought to be under the earth somewhere and was divided into two compartments with a great chasm fixed between which cannot be crossed. Faithful believers in God went to the place of the righteous dead (also called “paradise” or “Abraham's bosom, side”). It was a place of comfort, not torment. Unbelievers went to a waiting place for the final judgment.
There, the rich man had memory, and visual recognition, felt pain and torment. In “paradise,” Abraham talked.

Some theologians hold the position that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, he descended into Hades, into paradise and emptied paradise. He took all those believers who were there and removed paradise to heaven. Whether paradise was in sheol or heaven is debatable. But, we do know from 2 Corinthians 12 where Paul speaks of being taken to the third heaven or paradise that they were in the same place by that time.

As soon as the payment for sin was made, access to God was possible. That is the meaning of having the veil of the temple torn. (Matthew 27:51) This curtain hid the Holy of Holies where God dwelled in the Temple. Only the high priest could enter that place once a year. The curtain was torn from top to bottom. It was 1 inch thick, 50 feet wide and could not have been torn by humans. God himself tore the veil to let us know that access to his presence was now possible.

So, today when a believer dies, she goes immediately to be with Christ. Sadly, when unbelievers die, they go to a place of torment to await the final judgment. There is no second chance.

In Acts 24:15, Paul confirms that there will be a resurrection of believers and unbelievers. This means we should expect the reuniting of body and soul of both believers and nonbelievers. All unbelievers will then be judged, and cast into the lake of fire with Satan and all his angels. That's the second death. That's hell. (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8)

Not soul sleep—the insensitivity of the soul after death.

Another view is that the soul sleeps and is insensitive after death until the day of the resurrection. This view tends to come from a misunderstanding of the biblical phrase "fallen asleep."

As we saw in Luke 16:19-31 above, the souls of the rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham were conscious after death. Each could remember, talk, and experience pain or pleasure. The place of torment was not a place of soul sleep or forgetting. As described above in Philippians 1:23, Paul would know the joy and awareness of being present with the Lord. In John 11:12-15, Jesus defined "fallen asleep" for us. He said that their friend Lazarus was dead. The phrase “fallen asleep” is used throughout the New Testament for death of believers only. The body "sleeps" in the earth until Jesus calls it forth at the Rapture.

Not reincarnation—the continual cycle of death and rebirth.

Reincarnation is an old view of life as a continual cycle of death and rebirth, broken only through self-effort so that a soul will reach the blissful state of “Nirvana.” Sadly, there is no presence of God in Nirvana, only an impersonal, featureless unity of being. Sadly still, much of this teaching has infiltrated the church.

The answer can be found in many places, but especially in Hebrews 9:27, “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

Not purgatory—place of purification

A view that infiltrated the church several centuries after Jesus’ death and resurrection is that believers’ souls must go to a place to be purified before entering heaven. This teaching has confused and caused grief to many. The term “purgatory” comes from the word “purge” meaning “to purify.” Purgatory is conjectured to be a place of temporary punishment for the souls of believers who had not fully paid the penalty of their sins while here on earth.

Sometime after the first century ended, when all the apostles were dead, there arose a teaching that God's forgiveness of the believer's sins did not wipe out the believer's need to pay penance for his/her sin. Penance is voluntary self-punishment or reparation to show repentance for wrongdoing. According to this teaching, failing to do penance in this life requires the need to be
punished in another place before being finally saved. This teaching negates grace and goes back to the Old Testament concept of law. This teaching says salvation comes by initial faith plus additional works. Like all error, this teaching involves a wrong concept of God.

What started out as error in teaching soon became tradition that was later incorporated into the state church of the Roman Empire, now known as the Roman Catholic Church. Century after century, there arose biblically oriented groups who tried to "purge" the church of this erroneous teaching, but to no avail. Martin Luther denounced it. John Calvin called it a "deadly fiction of Satan, which nullifies the cross of Christ." Yet, modern Protestants, while avoiding the name "purgatory," frequently teach the doctrine of "the middle state," a realm of progressive development!

The logical consequence of this teaching is believers feeling continual guilt for not doing enough to pay for sin committed while on earth. Anyone who is caught up in salvation by works finds it hard to accept God's full grace on every believer. You start with the "yes but's" and the "what if's." What if you didn't acknowledge all your sins and/or pay the penance for all your sins before you died? What about the man who experienced a deathbed conversion and had no time for paying his penance for his sins? Then, it must be done after death, right? So, you go to purgatory to be punished for, or purged of, previous sin. Purified so you can finally be perfectly pure and worthy to enter heaven.

How does this purification take place? According to this teaching, there are several options:

- **Option 1:** The living can do good works or self-punishment in your place.
- **Option 2:** The living can pray for the dead to be relieved of their suffering and for God to have mercy on them.
- **Option 3:** A purifying fire in purgatory burns away bad deeds.
- **Option 4:** high-ranking church official can grant an indulgence, or remission of punishment still due for a sin

Is there scriptural support for the existence of a purgatory? Absolutely none! Is there scriptural teaching against it? Lots. The New Testament is filled with truth that counters this error-filled teaching.

**1. It is God's job to perfect us!**

Philippians 1:6 teaches, "being confident of this, that he [God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

1 Thessalonians 3:13 teaches, "May he [God] strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

Colossians 1:22 teaches, "But now he [God] has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

We read in Hebrews 9:14 that Christ died to clear our consciences of guilt from sin for which he has already paid.

If anyone would be the best candidate for "purgatory," it would be the thief crucified next to Jesus on the cross. According to Jesus’ own words in Luke 23:43, the thief went directly with Jesus to God’s presence, to “paradise.” He didn't have time to pay penance for all his sins. Yet, Christ himself said he would be in paradise that very night with Jesus. Jesus certainly wasn’t going to purgatory first!
2. Purgatory violates two scriptural truths.

What is truth: tradition or the scripture? Tradition is never truth unless it is totally and completely based upon scripture and nothing else.

Truth #1: Belief, not behavior, is the basis for receiving eternal life.

Jesus said in John 5:24, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” The believer in Christ crosses over from death into eternal life—instantly—by believing.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God —not by works, so that no one can boast.” Our salvation and entrance into heaven is entirely based on God’s grace alone, nothing we can do.

Truth #2: Only the blood of Jesus cleanses from sin, not man's work or suffering.

The New Testament is clear on this subject. For example, Colossians 2:13-14 says,

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”

Jesus canceled ALL our debt of sin. ALL our sins were forgiven on the cross—past, present and future. And, since all our sins were future at that time, all are forgiven the moment we believed, not just those from our own pasts.

Paul adds in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And, he stresses in Romans 8:1, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

So, the soul of the believer, after departing the body, is forgiven of all sin and cannot do anything to earn God’s favor and pardon apart from faith in Jesus Christ alone.

3. What about praying for the dead?

This concept is definitely not biblical. It was practiced by pagan religions and incorporated into Jewish thought and writing before Jesus’ birth. Jesus never perpetuated this thinking. The apostles never taught it. Paul certainly never gave it any credence in his writings. Yet, the superstitious practice crept into the church by the late 2nd century. As the church moved away from God’s grace and more toward purifying through good works here on earth, the doctrine of purgatory took hold because it gave relatives hope if their loved ones were not perfect.

So, by the close of the 4th century, prayers for the believing dead were found in all the church liturgies with the assertion that such practice was from the apostles themselves. What started as error became tradition, and then tradition became doctrine claimed as truth. The same may be said of the idea that you can do good works to pay for the sins of dead loved ones waiting in purgatory.

The practice of devotion to the believing dead is consoling to us. It can be consoling to the dying persons who don't think they are good enough to get into heaven yet. It gives to the afflicted survivors a sense of power to relieve their friend's suffering. Yet, it deludes everyone away from the truth and robs practitioners of true comfort and joy through understanding complete forgiveness given through God’s grace alone to every believer.
LESSON EIGHT

The bottom line is this: 1) prayers for relief from suffering are useless since there is no purgatory, and 2) prayers for the dead unbeliever to be saved are useless since there is no second chance once this physical life ends.

4. What about praying to the dead?

There is no scriptural support that saints and martyrs intercede with God either for the dead or for the living. In fact, offering prayer to a "saint" or martyr is not only unreasonable but also idolatrous. Jesus firmly teaches in Matthew 4:10 that we are to give our worship to God only, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”

In Hebrews, we read:

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)

“but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (Hebrews 7:24-25)

Jesus is our high priest; we can always go directly to him. We are all saints. We have perfect access to him. That's why the veil was torn. No one, living or dead, is closer to God than you are! And Jesus continually intercedes for us—listens to us and works on our behalf.

Romans 8 discusses this further:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And, he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” Romans 8:26-27)

Jesus' very Spirit lives inside every believer bringing our prayers directly to God. No one, living or dead, is closer to God than we are with the Spirit living inside of us! There is no scriptural indication that dead believers dwelling in heaven can even hear us or know what is going on in our lives. They have no power. Jesus has the power to do anything in our lives. Trust Him. Pray through His Spirit living inside you.

5. What about babies and children who die before choosing Christ on their own?

• Trust the character of God who is not a vengeful dictator with a whip.

• Depend on the grace of God. Understanding God's grace tells me that none of us deserve to be saved. None of us ever could make it to heaven on our own merit. It is only his grace that accepts me because of what Jesus already did. Jesus died on the cross for all sin, for all people. Jesus died for the sins of those babies and children and mentally deficient ones as well. He tells us that the kingdom of God already belongs to them.

• Jesus paid the penalty for everyone. God has the right to extend his grace to babies and children who have not yet reached the age of being able to reject him.
According to Matthew 18:2-6, 10; 19:1, the Lord places great value on little ones. Children are born with an innate sense of belief or trust in the existence and love of God the Father and love for Jesus. They don’t have to be convinced until, as they grow older, adults convince them not to believe it and thus reject Jesus. That is certainly causing one of his little ones to stumble. The culprit deserves punishment.

Conclusion: since scripture is silent about this, it must be of no concern to us. God is still in charge. We don’t have to figure everything out. Jesus, in his teaching, refers to little ones who believe in him. We must trust our God, who knows every heart and judges by the intent of the heart not by our rules.

**WHAT DOES HAPPEN TO THE SOUL OF A BELIEVER?**

The soul of a believer goes to HEAVEN—the spiritual realm in which the glory of God’s presence is manifest, and in which dwell the angels of God, and all believers who have departed this world. Heaven is a place that human words are inadequate to fully describe. We don’t know everything, but we do know what God has revealed to us through His Word.

In Acts 7:55-60, Stephen got a glimpse of heaven for us. Heaven opened, the glory of God was visible, and Jesus was standing ready to receive his spirit. According to v. 60, “Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.” He died. Where do you think his spirit (soul) went then? Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, “and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

Jesus spoke about this to his disciples in the book of John.

> “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:3)

Jesus is preparing a place for us so we can be with Him.

> “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.” (John 17:24)

Jesus wants us to be with Him in glory!

As referenced before in Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8, WE KNOW THAT for those who belong to Christ, heaven is the immediate destination after death.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write in 1 Thessalonians,

> “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18)
We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. Jesus brings the souls of the dead believers with Him. So, they must be with Him first.

And finally, David wrote in Psalm 16:11, “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

We say when a Christian loved one dies, "I lost my mother, brother, etc." We didn't lose them. We know just where they are. And death is gain, not loss. We need to change our terminology. Some use the phrase "they passed" rather than passed away. The believer just passed from here into the presence of the Lord. Paul said departing to be with Christ was better by far. In fact, according to Jesus' parable in Luke 16:19-31, we receive comfort there.

Do we get a temporary body? Scripture doesn't say. The Christian believer may rest assured that God, who so wondrously created the soul for the body is able to take care of it also while it is outside of the body. One thing is for sure. We are released from the struggle with sin through being set free from our mortal body.

"that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:19)"

But there’s more. Christ's resurrection guaranteed our resurrection. “Resurrection” is a word only used for the body, not the spirit. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 (referenced above), the spirits of those believers who died will be returning with Jesus. Graves will be opened and resurrected bodies will join with their spirits in the air with the Lord. This will only be visible to believers—living and dead. Christ’s second Coming, standing on the Mount of Olives is visible to everyone.

CONCLUSION

The hope of heaven transforms our perspective on death. The Scriptures nowhere teach that as believers we are immune from or should deny the reality of sorrow that death can bring. But in Christ, we share in his victory over death! We grieve, but we grieve not as those who have no hope, rather as those who are certain of our reunion with loved ones who have gone before, of receiving a glorious body that will never weaken or decay, of entering a wonderful new life beyond our fondest dreams, and of forever being with the Lord!!

If you have not trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, being separated from Him forever is the punishment for sin. Why should you be separated when that penalty was paid for you? All you have to do is recognize that you are a sinner and worthy of the punishment then believe that Jesus Christ took that punishment for you and accept Him as your substituted and your Savior. A pardon cannot be forced on anyone. A pardon must be accepted. The death of Jesus Christ was SUFFICIENT for all sins, but it is EFFICIENT only when you personally put your faith in Him.

Remember what Jesus promised in John 5:24,

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life."

Isn’t that wonderful? The way to heaven is a one-way street. There is no going back. Eternal life would not be eternal if it did not last. Because of our God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, the sting of death has been removed. It has not power to enslave us any longer. I invite you, if you have never trusted the Lord, to do so today, right now.
"When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)
Lesson 9: Prepared for His Return

1 Thessalonians 5:1-28

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

1. The day of the Lord refers to the whole period of the Lord's climactic judgment work on the earth ending in His setting up His Kingdom. Notice the contrast of pronouns "we/you" and "they/others." What does Paul say about the activities/attitudes of each group?

"WE/YOU" GROUP

"THEY/OTHERS" GROUP

2. For the unbelievers, what will occur on the "day of the Lord?"

- Isaiah 13:6-13 —

- Matthew 24:36-39 —

3. Has God been faithful to warn mankind about impending judgment in the past? Remember Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah, Jonah, all the prophets of the Old Testament.

4. Is there any real reason not to heed His warning of coming judgment on the unbelieving world?

5. **Gaining Perspective:** We've looked at them (nonbelievers) and us (believers) impersonally. But, we all know those who don't believe in Christ, maybe in your own family. How has this lesson changed your outlook about your everyday example before them?
6. Read the following verses to answer the question, “What instructions did Jesus give believers regarding the circumstances surrounding His return for them/us?”
   • Mark 13:32-35 —
   • Acts 1:7-11 —
   • Revelation 16:15 —

7. What comfort does Paul give to the Thessalonian believers in the anticipation of the coming "day of the Lord?"

8. Notice the beginning of verse 11. Even Paul had a “Gaining Perspective” section! He's telling the Thessalonians, "Now that you know the truth about death and the coming of the Lord, that knowledge should affect how you live and think." Discuss his instructions.

9. **Gaining Perspective:** Have you been raised with the misconception that God's wrath was to be directed at you, that you weren't holy enough to escape His wrath? After reading verses 9-11, explain what you have learned to counteract that misconception.
Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18.

10. Believers live in a unique relationship with one another. We have a common destiny and a mutual responsibility to each other. These verses describe the responsibilities of an overall shepherding ministry. What are they?

11. What should be the response of those being "shepherded?"

12. Verses 16-18 instruct how to live by faith on a daily basis all day long. These commands or instructions transcend all cultures at all times! With each one, explain what is meant or how to do it.
   a. Rejoice/be joyful always—
   b. Pray without ceasing/continually—
   c. In everything give thanks/give thanks in all circumstances—

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28.

13. What impact would the attitudes in verses 16-18 firmly entrenched in your life have on the following…?
   • Your service —
   • Persecution you may face —
   • Waiting on Christ's return —
14. What further instruction does Paul give the Thessalonians in these verses?
   - Verse 19 —
   - Verses 20-21 —
   - Verses 25-27 —

15. What promise is given to all of us in verses 23-24?

16. Where is the believer's hope?

**Focus on the Meaning:** Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God. Thus, faith believes God to be true, hope awaits the time when his truth shall be manifested; faith believes that he is our Father, hope anticipates that he will ever show himself to be a Father toward us; faith believes that eternal life has been given to us, hope anticipates that it will sometime be revealed; faith is the foundation upon which hope rests, hope nourishes and sustains faith...Hope strengthens faith, that it may not waver in God's promises, or begin to doubt concerning their truth. Hope refreshes faith, that it may not become weary. It sustains faith to the final goal, that it may not fail in mid-course, or even at the starting gate." (John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, p. 590)

17. **Gaining Perspective:** Hope is the anchor of the soul! How does that encourage you?
Lesson 10: Being Counted Worthy

2 Thessalonians Chapter 1

Historical Perspective
This epistle contains evidence that Paul had recently heard news about current conditions in the Thessalonian church. Probably most of this information came to him from the person who had carried 1 Thessalonians to its recipients and had returned to Paul at Corinth. Perhaps other people who had news of the church had informed Paul, Silas, and Timothy also. Some of the news was good. The majority of the Thessalonians were continuing to grow and to remain faithful to Christ in spite of persecution. Unfortunately, some of the news was bad. False teaching concerning the day of the Lord had entered the church and was causing confusion and leading some of the Christians to quit their jobs in expectation of the Lord’s imminent return.

In view of these reports Paul evidently felt constrained to write this epistle. Almost all conservative scholars believe that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians from Corinth. The topics he treated in the second letter seem to grow out of situations he alluded to in the first letter. It appears that Paul composed 2 Thessalonians quite soon after 1 Thessalonians, perhaps within 12 months. This would place the date of composition in the early A.D. 50s, perhaps A.D. 51, and would make this the third of Paul’s canonical writings, assuming Galatians was his first.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12.

1. What seems to be the intent of Paul’s writing again to the Thessalonians?

2. By what affectionate term does Paul refer to his readers and why?

3. Which words, including names, are repeated in this section?
4. Discuss Paul's commendation of the Thessalonians' behavior in verses 3 and 4.

5. In what ways would their behavior encourage Paul himself? Read also 1 Thessalonians 3:5, 10.

6. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3 again, noticing the mention of their faith, hope and love. Compare to 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 to determine which one is not mentioned. What do you think happened?


9. In what ways would God act as their/our Avenger? See also Romans 12:19. David well knew of this part of God's character. See Psalm 143:12.
**Historical Insight:** In the future God in His justice would punish the Thessalonians’ persecutors and give rest to his readers as well as to all Christians who suffer affliction for the gospel. This will take place when Jesus Christ returns to the earth in judgment. This is not a reference to the Rapture. *(Constable’s Notes on 2 Thessalonians, pp. 4-5)*

10. How would knowing this give relief to the Thessalonians? See also 1 Peter 5:8-10.

11. **Gaining Perspective:** Have you recognized a time when God acted as your Avenger? Describe what happened and how you felt.


13. Paul defines eternal hell in verse 9. How does he describe it?

14. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Jesus talked about hell and judgment more than anyone else in the Bible. It was the penalty for sin (Romans 6:23). He came to pay that penalty for sin. Use your concordance to find references in the gospels that reveal more about hell.
15. **Gaining Perspective:** Do you have a problem accepting the reality of hell?

- Reread all the verses given above and do your own study if needed to see what the Bible consistently says about this destiny for the unbeliever.

- How should this information impact your concern for the unbeliever? Does it?

16. In 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12, Paul talks twice about the Thessalonians being counted or made worthy. Define "worthy" using a dictionary.

17. Explain what Paul means in v. 11 when he says, "that our God will count you worthy of your calling." See also Philippians 1:6, 27-30. Add your own cross-references.

**Scriptural Insight:** "Paul consistently made what god has done for believers the basis of his appeals for them to lead lives in keeping with their destiny. Christians do not live worthily in order to obtain salvation but because they have been granted salvation." (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, p. 716)


19. **Gaining Perspective:** How should this information impact the way you choose to live today?
11: Avoiding Deception

2 Thessalonians Chapter 2

Scriptural Insight: Chapter 2 contains truth about the end times revealed nowhere else in Scripture. This section is key to understanding future events, and it is central to the argument of this epistle...Many people throughout church history have confused the teaching of the apostles that Christ could come at any moment (for believers at the Rapture) and the unbiblical idea that He would come at any moment. The first correct view is the doctrine of imminence, but the second incorrect view involves date setting. (Constable’s Notes on 2 Thessalonians, p. 8)

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.
1. Verse 1 reviews Paul's reason for writing this letter and refers back to a question he obviously addressed in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10). He gets specific in verse 2. What was unsettling the Thessalonians?

2. Paul had warned them in his first letter and given instruction. Explain the instructions given in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21. See also 2 Peter 3:15-16.

3. Gaining Perspective: Turning away from truth that previously had been acknowledged is called “apostasy.” Are you careful to critically analyze what you see, read, and hear? How do you know if it is truth or not?

4. Reread verse 2. The opposite attitude toward the day of the Lord can also be taken and is prevalent today. Read 2 Peter 3:3-7. What attitude does Peter warn about? What scripture do people with this attitude have to ignore or explain away?
5. **Gaining Perspective:** Describe any experiences you have had with people/churches who maintain the same attitude described in 2 Peter 3:3-7. What gives them hope, if not the return of Christ?

6. Describe the general "signs" preceding the day of the Lord. See also Daniel 9:24-27 and Matthew 24:1-35 which give more descriptive detail.

7. Regarding what Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2, what characteristics describe this man of lawlessness or abomination of desolation? See also Daniel 11:36-37 and Revelation 13:5-8.

8. **Gaining Perspective:** In our society, we are obsessed with the sensational. How can we know whether miracles, signs, and wonders are counterfeits or not? Review the purpose of miracles in Hebrews 2:3-4. How can we determine who will be glorified/worshipped as a result?

9. In verses 6-7, who and/or what do you think is holding back/restraining the man of lawlessness?

10. Who is the only one who knows when these things will take place?
Focus on the Meaning: The "mystery" (truth previously not revealed but now made known) Paul referred to here is the revelation of a future climax of lawlessness that would follow the removal of the restrainer. This lawless movement was already underway in Paul's day, but God was holding it back until His appointed time. Then He will remove the restraining influence. This removal is probably a reference to the Rapture when God's restraint of evil through His people will end as He removes them from the earth. God will remove the Holy Spirit from the earth in the sense that God will remove those whom He indwells and He with them. He will not entirely abandon the earth, of course, since God is omnipresent. (Constable's Notes on 2 Thessalonians, p. 15)

11. Gaining Perspective: As awful as the day of the Lord sounds, how does knowing who is in control of it all give you comfort and keep you from giving way to fear? Can you trust Him to carry out His plans and still take care of you?

12. Paul says, "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work." Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5, another prophecy concerning the last days. Do you agree with Paul? Explain your answer.

13. Discuss verses 9-12 in the context of what we have already learned regarding God's judgment of those who refuse the gospel. See also Romans 1:20-32.

14. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 5:9-10 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8. What is the good news for the Thessalonian believers and for us?

15. Gaining Perspective: Praise God for His great salvation for you and me who have chosen to love the truth and believe His gospel!!! Meditate on what salvation truly means to you for the rest of the day.
Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17.

16. From verses 13-15, list all that God has already done/planned to do for the Thessalonians and all believers.

17. So, what is our responsibility now? To what traditions (NET) / teachings (NIV) was Paul referring? Refer back to 2 Thessalonians 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 13; 4:1-2, 8-9.

Focus on the Meaning: In view of their calling, Paul urged his readers not to abandon what he and his associates had taught them in person and by letter. He wanted them to hold firmly to the inspired instructions that he handed on to them, "the traditions." (Constable's Notes on 2 Thessalonians, p. 18)

18. Paul wrote magnificent words of encouragement as the Holy Spirit led him to write. Who is the Ultimate Encourager? Discuss verses 16-17.

19. Gaining Perspective: Read Psalm 56:3,4. What do these verses say to you? God knows our every need. As His child, you can go directly to Him and ask for encouragement from Him for yourself.
12: The Value of Work

2 Thessalonians Chapter 3

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18.

1. Reread 3:1-5 and 1 Thessalonians 5:25. In what areas does Paul, the minister, need the Thessalonians to pray for him and his co-workers? See also Colossians 4:3-4.

2. In verse 2, the word "delivered" means rescued, away from. Paul was in Corinth writing this letter. Read Acts 18:5-17. What was happening there? How was God answering the Thessalonians' prayer?

3. Discuss Paul's confidence in the Lord concerning the Thessalonians. Refer to 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

Scriptural Insight: The character of God should be the basis for a Christian's confidence. Because God has promised to supply believers' needs, Paul could rest in the assurance that He would provide strength (1 Thessalonians 3:2, 13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17) to withstand temptation and trials, and protection from the adversary and his emissaries (Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:24). (The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament, p. 722)

4. Gaining Perspective: Are you confident in God? Do you know without a shadow of a doubt, that He who is faithful, will always be there for you? Explain your answer and how this gives you encouragement in your own prayer life.
5. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-15. Idleness must have been a common problem in Thessalonica as Paul mentions it several times. Review 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 5:14. What do you think Paul means when he refers to those who were leading an undisciplined or idle life?

6. Read 1 Timothy 5:13-15. What counsel does Paul give Timothy, the pastor, regarding certain idle women in his church?

7. In what ways does an undisciplined/idle person affect…?
   • Herself —
   • Others around her (family, neighbors, co-workers) —
   • An entire organization —

8. Discuss Paul's command in verses 6, 14-15 as a method for dealing with this problem. Bring in other scriptures that give additional insight.

**Scriptural Insight:** The faithful majority in the church was to separate, probably individually and socially, from the unruly to alert the offenders to the fact that their behavior was not acceptable. The desired result was that they would repent. Paul had earlier warned those who were idle (1 Thess. 5:14), but evidently they had not responded. Now firmer measures were necessary (cf. Matt. 18:15-17). The offenders constituted a minority who lived undisciplined lives contrary to the teaching and example of the missionaries. *(Constable's Notes on 2 Thessalonians, p. 21)*
9. **Gaining Perspective:** Is there an unruly or idle person affecting your life? Are you the unruly/idle person affecting your life? How will you apply what you have learned in this lesson?

10. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18 and 1 Thessalonians 2:9. What example did Paul and his companions set as the proper attitude toward work?

**Scriptural Insight:** The apostles had every right to receive physical help for spiritual ministry (1 Corinthians 9:3-14; 1 Timothy 5:18; Galatians 6:6). But they chose to forego this right in order to teach the importance of self-sacrificing love and industry...His point here was that Christians generally should not expect other people to take care of them but should support themselves as much as possible...The individuals in view here were not those who could not work but those who would not work. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, p. 723)

11. What is Paul's command to the undisciplined ones in verse 12?

**From the Greek:** The Greek word translated “settle down (NIV)” or “work quietly (NET) in verse 12 points to the quality of mind that is to be associated with their working. It denotes a condition of inward peace and tranquility reflecting itself in outward calmness; it is the opposite of their fussy activity as busybodies. (*Constable’s Notes on 2 Thessalonians*, p. 22)

12. What are the many results/blessings of hard work? Read the following verses to derive your answer.
   - Galatians 6:7-10 —
   - Colossians 3:22-24 —
• Ephesians 6:5-8 —

• 1 Timothy 6:18-19 —

13. Why should Christians make the best employees? See also 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

14. Gaining Perspective: Considering yourself as a worker:
   • Whether your employer is a business or your home, in what practical ways can you commit to working hard?

   • How has your work ethic already benefited you and others around you?

   • Are you inspiring those in your sphere of influence to have an excellent work ethic?


16. Looking specifically at 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18, why do you think that Paul wanted to leave his personal mark on this letter? See also 1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11 and Colossians 4:18.
17. What confidence does this give you regarding the authenticity of the letters of Paul in the Bible?

18. Now that we have studied both letters to the Thessalonians, what did Paul repeatedly emphasize to the Thessalonian believers?

19. **Gaining Perspective:** The purpose of Bible Study IS an encounter with God, NOT just Bible knowledge. To force us to deal with Him personally. To see relationships with Him and each other. How has this study influenced you in your relationship with the Savior?
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