



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Leader Guide

Spring 2022 | CSB



SSA

awake
with him.
es togeth-
s also ye do.

YOURSELVES

brethren, ¹⁶to know
g you, and are over-
admonish you;
them very highly in
s sake. ¹⁷And be at peace

es.
hort you, brethren, ¹⁸warn
e unruly, ¹⁹comfort the feeble-
support the weak, ²⁰be patient
all men.

se that none render evil unto
an; but ever ²¹follow that which is
d, both among yourselves, and to all

¹⁶ Rejoice evermore.

¹⁷ Pray without ceasing.

¹⁸ In every thing give thanks; for this
is the will of God in Christ Jesus concern-
ing you.

¹⁹ Quench not the Spirit.

²⁰ Despise not prophesyings.

²¹ Prove all things; ²²hold fast that which
is good.

²² Abstain from all appearance of evil.

FINAL EXHORTATIONS

²³ And ²⁴the very God of peace ²⁵sanctify
you wholly; and ²⁶I pray God your whole spirit
and soul and body ²⁷be preserved blameless
unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁶ 17 Luke 18:1; 21:36; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Pet. 4:7 ¹⁸ 19 Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17 ²⁰ 21 Eph. 4:30; 1 Tim. 4:5; cp. 1 Cor. 14:30 ²² 23 20 1 Cor. 14:1,39 ²⁴ 25 21 1 Cor. 2:11,15; 1 John 4:1 ²⁶ 27 Php. 4:8 ²⁸ 29 22 1 Thess. 4:12 ³⁰ 31 23 Php. 4:9 ³² 1 Thess. 3:13 ³³ 1 Cor. 1:8

coming are caught up (Gk har-
the clouds to meet the Lord in the
term "rapture" is derived from rap-

in the modern state of Israel. Just before
the day of the Lord when people think they
have this peace, sudden destruction will

Christians will be kept out
hour of testing (Rev. 3:10
5:10 See note at vv. 4-8.

U N D E R S T A N D | E X P L O R E | A P P L Y

1, 2 Thessalonians



THE BEST ADVICE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SESSIONS

SUGGESTED FOR THE WEEK OF

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS

Bob Bunn wrote the Bible exposition for this study of 1, 2 Thessalonians. He recently joined the Explore the Bible team and serves as content editor of the *Explore the Bible Commentary*. Bob has earned degrees from Liberty University, Ohio University, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit LifeWay.com/doctrinalguideline.

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A WORD FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**

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

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

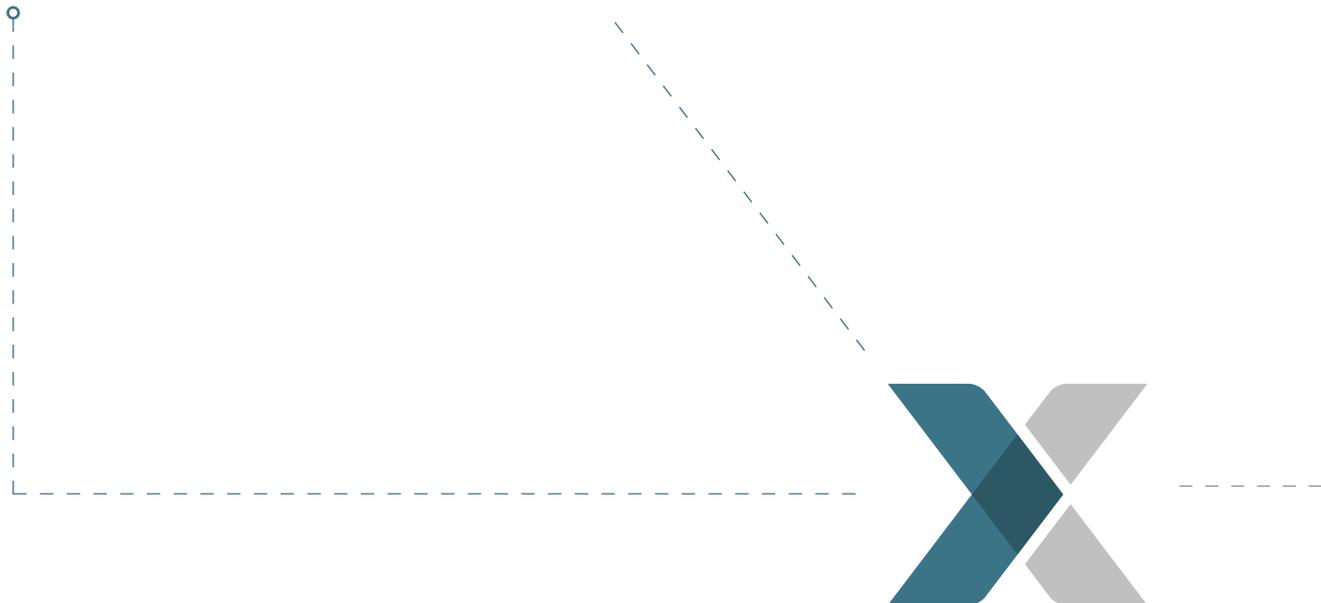
In our culture, we can easily become distracted by the noise of a lost and fallen world. We need to not allow that noise to silence us or discourage us. We serve the risen Savior who is coming back to take us home. Our lives should be a celebration of that reality, and our future should give us the confidence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

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

In His service,

G. Dwayne McCrary

dwayne.mccrary@lifeway.com



WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Achaia [uh KAY yuh]—Roman province in the southern part of Greece, including Athens (Acts 17:16-33) and Corinth (Acts 18:27-28), the administrative center.

apostasy—the act of straying from what one has previously believed. The term (*apostasia*) was used to describe a political uprising as well as spiritual infidelity. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul taught that apostasy would precede the day of the Lord.

archangel—from the Greek *archangelos*, literally “chief angel” or “first angel.” The term appears twice in the Bible: in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 the voice of the archangel will accompany Christ’s return; in Jude 9 Michael the archangel disputed with the devil in an argument about Moses’s body.

day of the Lord—the day of Christ’s final victory (1 Thess. 5:2). The term carries the idea of judgment but also serves as an assurance of His blessing on believers.

Macedonia [MASS uh DOH nih uh]—a Roman province in the northern half of Greece (Acts 16:9-10). Thessalonica was its largest city and capital of the province.

man of lawlessness—According to 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4,9-12, the man of lawlessness is the ultimate opponent of Christ who will actively try to draw people away from following God and make them his followers instead. Many scholars equate him with the antichrist in 1 John 2:18.

Philippi [FIH lih pig]—city in the province of Macedonia. Paul’s missionary work in Philippi is recorded in Acts 16:11-40. Persecution in Philippi resulted in Paul’s going to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1).

Silas; Silvanus [SIGH luhs; sil VAY nuhs]—a leader in the Jerusalem church (2 Cor. 1:19) who accompanied Paul on missionary journeys (Acts 15:40-41; 16:19-24). He joined Paul in writing the Thessalonian letters (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

Timothy—a friend and coworker of Paul (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; 4:9). He is listed with Paul as co-writer of six letters (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Philem. 1).

BIBLE READING PLAN

MARCH	APRIL	MAY
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. 1 Thess. 1:1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. 1 Thess. 4:6	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. 1 Thess. 5:26-28
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USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD

BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. Study the core passage.

Start preparing early. Read the passage, listing people, places, key words, key phrases, and actions taken. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to discover information about the items you listed. Write a summary of the main idea you discovered using the statement printed under the session title of each session as a starting place.

2. Create a group time plan.

Craft a group plan that helps the group discover and respond to the main idea. Consult the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (includes ideas for using the *Personal Study Guide*). Identify ways to focus the group's attention, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson, found at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras). Review the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* items. Look at the LifeWay Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

3. Gather and review.

Use the list under Gather on the first page of each session. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for anticipated guests.

DURING THE GROUP TIME

4. Arrive early.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet everyone as participants arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.

Use the plan you created, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns; be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. Evaluate and Record.

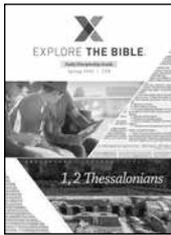
Review the Reinforce idea to encourage the group to put into practice the truths discovered. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you be a better teacher in the future.

7. Start preparing to lead the next group time.

MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide & Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.



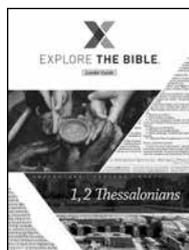
Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in back.



Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.



Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the Personal Study Guide. Includes commentary and teaching plans.



Additional Leader Helps

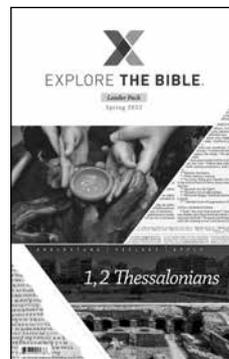
Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.



QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides a tool for an individual called on to step in to lead the group on short notice.



Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the Leader Guide commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).

Find out more or order at goExploreTheBible.com

INTRODUCTION TO 1, 2 THESSALONIANS

At some point, someone may have told you, “I’ve got good news, and I’ve got bad news.” Typically, that’s how life works. We live on a roller coaster of positive and negative situations. Thankfully, as believers, we have Christ to guide us through both the ups and the downs.

The good news and bad news scenario also has another benefit. It reminds us that we always have room to grow. Because we are humans, we are not perfect; we never will be. But we don’t have to stand still. With God’s help, we can move forward, becoming more and more of who God desires us to be.

In a nutshell, that’s the message behind Paul’s letters to the Thessalonian church. In both Letters to the Thessalonians, Paul freely showed his appreciation for the positive things he saw in this church. But he also pointed out some chinks in their armor and challenged them to mature in every area. This balance between the good of the moment and the better that can be makes the study of these short letters so important for Christians in the twenty-first century.

The ancient city of Thessalonica sat where the modern city of Thessaloniki is now located in northeastern Greece on the Thermaic Gulf. The city was founded around 315 BC by Cassander, a Greek general serving under Alexander the Great. He named the town after his wife, who was also Alexander’s half sister. In time, it grew to be the largest city in the northern Greek province of Macedonia.

Thanks to its location, Thessalonica quickly grew into a major trade city, rivaled only by Corinth in the southern province of Achaia. The city enjoyed an excellent port and had easy access to the Danube River to the north. This gave merchants access to both European resources and the major cities around the Mediterranean Sea.

The city of Thessalonica also served as an important cultural center for the Greeks. Even during the Roman period, the city maintained its Greek spirit. By the time Paul first arrived (Acts 17:1), the Romans had exerted a little more influence. However, Thessalonica was still considered a free city. This means no Roman occupation force was stationed there, and it enjoyed a measure of freedom in managing its own affairs. For example, Thessalonica could mint its own coins.

Ethnically, Thessalonica’s role as a major commercial site created a melting pot. Along with Romans and Greeks, merchants from around the Empire lived in the city. Apparently, it also had a substantial Jewish population. In Acts 17, Luke recorded that Paul ministered in the synagogue for three weeks, along with his work in the Greek marketplace (Acts 17:1-4).

Paul’s time in Thessalonica is recorded in Acts 17, but the context for his work begins in chapter 16. Barred by the Holy Spirit from going north, the apostle found an open door into Macedonia, beginning with the city of Philippi (Acts 16:6-40). While their stay in Philippi was tumultuous, Paul and his companions were able to establish a strong congregation before moving on.

As it turned out, his stay in Thessalonica was even more turbulent. Upset by Paul’s outreach to Gentiles, a group of jealous Jews incited a riot, and the mob dragged the apostle’s friend, Jason, before the city officials (Acts 17:5-9). After calmer heads prevailed, Paul’s friends urged him to leave the city by night for his own protection (Acts 17:10). He then worked his way south to the cities of Berea, Athens, and eventually, to Corinth (Acts 17:10–18:4).

Because his stay in Thessalonica was relatively short and his departure rushed, Paul began wondering how the young

church was doing and sent Timothy from Corinth back to Thessalonica to evaluate the congregation. When Timothy returned with a positive report (1 Thess. 3:6), Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians. Many believe Paul penned the letter between the summer of 50 AD and the early months of 51 AD, which would make it one of his earliest known epistles.

Several months later, Paul was still in Corinth and had received more reports from Thessalonica. These may have come in the form of updates from friends who had been to the city or possibly a response to his initial letter. Whatever the case, the apostle felt obliged to write a second letter to both review previous teaching and to encourage continued growth. Little evidence has been raised to question either the authenticity of each letter or Paul's authorship of them.

Regarding content, both letters strike a mostly positive tone and provide basic teaching on key doctrinal topics. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul praised the congregation for its faithfulness and for the influence it was having across Greece and throughout the empire (1 Thess. 1:4-10). He also encouraged them to stand strong in the face of persecution (1 Thess. 2:13-16; 3:4-5). These exhortations also appear in the second letter (2 Thess. 1:3-12).

Another foundational focus in both letters was Paul's teaching on eschatology (the doctrine of last things). In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, he provided one of his most extensive explanations of the second coming of Jesus. Likewise, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, he reminded his readers about the signs of the end times, including the rise and fall of "the man of lawlessness."

Paul also used both letters to implore the Thessalonian believers to continue

growing in holiness and in their love for one another (1 Thess. 4:1-12; 2 Thess. 2:13-3:5). For the apostle, practical application was an essential part of Christian maturity and effective ministry. Again, the Thessalonians had done well in many ways, but Paul knew they could excel even more in their faith.

The few negative issues Paul raised in the letters related to the influence of false teachers (2 Thess. 2:1-3a) and the danger of idleness among some members of the congregation (1 Thess. 5:12-14; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). It is possible these problems were related, and Paul gave the Thessalonian church instructions on how to overcome each one.

Paul's timeless directions provide help and hope for contemporary believers who struggle with similar questions and issues, just as the congregation in Thessalonica did centuries ago.

OUTLINES

1 THESSALONIANS

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

2 THESSALONIANS

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



ON THE COVER

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

Commended

Transformed lives impact others for the sake of the gospel.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

MEMORY VERSE: 1 THESSALONIANS 1:6

STUDY 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, listing the various people and groups identified in this passage. Use Explore the Text (pp. 15–19) to gain insight into the way they shared the gospel and influenced others to share. Note specifically the ways Paul used his influence to encourage believers to stay strong in their faith and continue their path of spiritual maturity.

CREATE a teaching plan for your group time using the ideas on pages 20–22. Use the Key Doctrine: *God's Purpose of Grace* to help the group understand how it applies to transforming lives for the sake of the gospel.

GATHER the following items:

- Extra Personal Study Guides (PSGs)

Prepare to display:

- Pack Item 1** (*Map: Paul's Second Missionary Journey*)
- Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of 1, 2 Thessalonians*)

Make copies of:

- Pack Item 7** (*Handout: 1, 2 Thessalonians Time Line*)
- Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*)
- Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Thessalonica in the First Century*)

CONSULT the weekly Explore the Bible adult podcast to gain insights on the go about this week's study on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.

REINFORCE the session by contacting group members, especially those who have missed some sessions. Remind them that a new study is starting and encourage them to become involved from the beginning.

FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God's Purpose of Grace

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

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

(In PSG, p. 10) **Who has influenced you the most in your life? Who are you working to mentor today?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

BIBLE SKILL

Use other Scripture to understand the context for this passage.

Review Acts 16–18. Focus on Paul's motivation for entering Greece and examine the different experiences he had in each city on his journey. What key actions and events stick out from Paul's time in Thessalonica? How might those experiences impact his feelings toward the believers in Thessalonica?

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

The origin of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica can be traced to his second missionary journey. Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, had been called by God to take the gospel into modern-day Europe (Acts 16:6-10). While their church-planting mission started in the city of Philippi, persecution eventually moved them to Thessalonica (17:1).

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

As the title indicates, this letter was the first of two epistles written by Paul to the Christians in Thessalonica. Located on the northern shore of the Aegean Sea, Thessalonica sat on the spot now occupied by the city of Thessaloniki. In Paul's day, it was the largest city and capital of the Macedonian province. Its harbor and position along a major trade route made it an important commercial hub. As a free Roman city, it represented a balance of Greek and Roman culture.

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

Paul likely wrote the letter during his stay in Corinth (Acts 18). It is impossible to know the precise timing between his departure from

Thessalonica and his letter; but if Paul came to the city around 50-51 AD, the letter was likely written within a year or two of that date. This would make 1 Thessalonians one of Paul's earliest letters, likely second only to his Letter to the Galatians.

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

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PARTNERSHIP (1 THESS. 1:1)

Verse 1

Paul began his letter with a traditional prescript that included three elements: identifying the sender(s), identifying the audience, and a short greeting. Paul identified himself as the primary writer but also included **•Silvanus** (Silas) and **•Timothy**, since they had helped plant the church. Silas had been with Paul in Antioch (Acts 15:32-34) and had replaced Barnabas when Paul initiated his second missionary journey. Timothy was a young man who came to Christ as a result of Paul's ministry in Lystra and joined the missionaries throughout their work in Greece (Acts 16-17). Paul regularly used the first person plural "we" throughout the book to emphasize the agreement among the three ministers.

The letter was written to the **church of the Thessalonians**. Paul used the Greek word *ekklesia* here, a word that referred to any assembly of people in the first century. God had assembled (or "called out") a group in Thessalonica. Some had rejected Jewish legalism, while others had escaped pagan idolatry. But every member had embraced **God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Paul's introduction emphasized that both **grace** and **peace** were gifts from God. God's grace is the foundation of our salvation, providing spiritual relief that we could not earn. Grace gives us a new standing with God, while peace reflects our new relationship with Him.

How is God's grace and peace manifested in your life each day? How can you share those gifts with others?

EVIDENCE (1 THESS. 1:2-5a)

Verses 2-3

Paul was a man of prayer—not only for his own needs but also for the believers he nurtured. In his letters, he often expressed his gratitude for

VERSE 1

¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace.

VERSES 2-3

² We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers. ³ We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

these Christians and demonstrated that gratitude through his prayers for them. He was able to **thank God** for the Thessalonians because they had accepted the gospel and were living out their faith. Paul was ultimately thankful for the way God had changed the Thessalonians' lives.

The gospel had some violent opponents in Thessalonica who already had started a riot and persecuted believers associated with Paul (Acts 17:6-9). So Paul's prayers were persistent on their behalf. The verb tense of verse 2 and descriptors like **always** and **constantly** indicate that Paul regularly prayed for his friends there, asking God to protect them and to help them grow.

One primary motivator of Paul's gratitude was the church's **work** in a pagan culture. Throughout this opening chapter, Paul highlighted how the Thessalonians demonstrated their faith through action (vv. 3,6,8-9). They were making a difference for the kingdom, despite opposition. If anything, the persecution was helping them grow stronger in their faith and ministry.

Paul made clear in other New Testament letters that salvation is the result of faith alone (Eph. 2:8-10). But while good works do not deliver salvation, they do demonstrate salvation. The Thessalonians' works were **produced by faith**. Their good deeds were validating the truth of the gospel.

Paul also noted that the Thessalonians' labor was **motivated by love**, while their endurance was **inspired by hope**. Paul's use of the Greek word translated **labor** (*kopos*) indicates that the Thessalonians were working hard to show love—even to the point of exhaustion. Paul also used a form of the Greek word *agape* to describe this love. They were sharing a God-centered, sacrificial love that put others first. The Thessalonians' love moved them to unselfish action toward one another and toward unbelievers.

Hope is not passive, wishful thinking. For Paul, hope was an active, firm assurance springing from strong faith. It represents a belief that something will happen despite evidence to the contrary. Christian hope rests in the confidence that Christ will return one day to make all things new.

Faith, love, and hope are signatures of Christ's work. Their demonstration in Thessalonica indicates that God was active in the middle of the congregation's struggles and questions. The word translated **endurance** points to persistence in the face of difficulties. Their confidence in God's presence and their hope for His future return strengthened their commitment and kept them on the right track spiritually.

(In PSG, p. 14) **To what evidence might a person point as proof of salvation?**

Verses 4-5a

Paul reminded the Thessalonians they were loved. First, he noted his own affection for them, calling them **brothers and sisters**. He was not alone in his attachment; they were **loved by God** and **chosen** by Him. In these verses, the apostle was assuring his readers of God's grace and mercy. His emphasis was not on who the Thessalonians were or what they had done, but on who

God is and what He has done through Christ. Students of the Scriptures should not let contemporary arguments obscure Paul's original purpose.

God had also shown His love through His work in their lives, both as individuals and as a congregation. Paul had shared the gospel, but his words were not the driving force behind the Thessalonians' faith. That's because God's message is more about God's **power** than about human speech. Christ alone provides salvation and enables believers to carry out their mission on earth.

The Thessalonians also had the benefit of the **Holy Spirit** guiding them. The evening before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that God would send the Spirit as a "Counselor" who offered the same encouragement and support as Christ (John 15:26). The Spirit would also lead them into truth and teach them how to speak the words of Christ (John 16:12-15).

Finally, Paul explained that the gospel gave his readers the **full assurance** of Christ's faithfulness. Even when persecuted, the Thessalonians had no reason to doubt that Jesus was with them and would empower them. Paul's own life demonstrated his firm conviction despite consistent suffering.

God's power, God's Spirit, and God's assurance provided sufficient evidence of the gospel's validity and the Thessalonians' relationship with Christ. God had given them proof of His work in their lives, and they were living proof to the world that salvation in Christ was real.

What do your actions tell the world about your faith? What needs to change?

INFLUENCE (1 THESS. 1:5b-8)

Verses 5b-6

The Thessalonians had watched Paul, even though the opportunity was somewhat limited. They were able to judge the character of Paul, Silas, and Timothy by how they **lived among** them. The missionaries had demonstrated their faith, and that had made an impact on the Thessalonians. As Paul and his friends moved among the young congregation, the Thessalonians experienced the **benefit** of their example.

In response, the Thessalonians **became imitators** of Paul's way of life—and of Christ. This Greek word often referred to the impression on a coin, specifically the image of an actual person. Paul later told the Corinthians that following his example would help them follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). The experience of the Thessalonians proved that to be true.

In addition, the Thessalonians saw Paul's faith in good times and in bad times. During his brief time in the city, Paul experienced **severe persecution** (1 Thess. 3:2-4). Antagonistic Jewish leaders followed him from city to city and even sparked a riot in Thessalonica. It is reasonable to assume that the Thessalonians had faced similar suffering.

VERSES 4-5a

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ^{5a} because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance.

VERSES 5b-6

^{5b} You know how we lived among you for your benefit, ⁶ and you yourselves became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit.

Yet the threat of the personal suffering never discouraged them from accepting the gospel or sharing its truth. Paul noted that they **welcomed the message with joy**, embracing it as their own. They recognized that this was no man-made philosophy or theology. It came from **the Holy Spirit**, whom they had received at the moment of salvation. His work in their lives affirmed that the joy of their salvation was eternal, while their suffering was temporary.

VERSES 7-8

⁷ As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out. Therefore, we don't need to say anything,

Verses 7-8

Thanks to God's work through the apostle and his coworkers, Paul's readers had rejected their old way of living and a new way in Christ. They also learned quickly that Jesus never intended for them to sit back and hoard His truth. He wanted them to pass it on—and they did.

The Thessalonians began exerting their own spiritual influence, first at home and then in the surrounding areas. Paul said they were **an example** to others, providing the same kind of living illustration that Paul had given them. What's more, their influence didn't stop at the city limits of Thessalonica. Their faith resonated throughout **Macedonia** and the entire region of **Achaia**.

During the first century, Greece was essentially divided into two major areas. The northern half was called Macedonia, where Thessalonica was located. The southern half was known as Achaia and included the major cities of Athens and Corinth. Paul's affirmation of the Thessalonians indicated that their influence had spread across hundreds of miles and essentially covered the entirety of ancient Greece.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He challenged His followers to make a difference in their hometown (Jerusalem), the surrounding regions (Judea/Samaria), and, ultimately, the entire globe (Acts 1:8). Despite the relative youth of the congregation, the Thessalonians were fulfilling this call in their own context.

Paul praised his friends for their good work in the Greek regions of Macedonia and Achaia. He also emphasized that their witness had no true borders. Their testimony **rang out** beyond Greece into other areas of the Roman Empire. Their story was being heard, and they were fast becoming a paradigm for other congregations.

It is not clear how the Thessalonian church's witness spread so quickly. Possibly, the church sent out missionaries from their congregation, but that is not recorded in Scripture. More likely, the city's port and its key position on the Empire's major trade routes expanded the church's influence as travelers carried the message beyond Greece.

(In PSG, p. 16) **How far does your influence for the gospel reach? How can you expand that influence?**

PURPOSE (1 THESS. 1:9-10)

Verse 9

The **report** that was circulating concerning the Thessalonians included two main points. First, it involved the **reception** Paul and his friends had received in the city. Despite the furor caused by the gospel's opponents, the Thessalonians had accepted Paul, Silas, and Timothy into their community. They had extended hospitality to these controversial messengers.

The reports also emphasized the believers' reception the gospel, which led to their decision **to turn to God from idols**. While the book of Acts focuses on Paul's ministry to Thessalonian Jews, the impact of the gospel on the Gentiles indicates that his influence stretched beyond the three weeks in the synagogue (Acts 17:1-4).

Their newfound passion led Paul's readers to **serve the living and true God** rather than man-made objects of worship. For Paul, such service validated genuine faith. Given the influence of pagan worship in Thessalonica, this was no minor decision for the city's believers. The Thessalonians essentially lived in the shadow of Mount Olympus, home of the Greek pantheon. Their conversion brought about a radical change, which included a measure of persecution and suffering.

Verse 10

As the Thessalonians served God in their culture, they also found an eternal hope as they waited for **his Son from heaven**. Their faith in the cross and the empty tomb had rescued them from **the coming wrath**. It also reminded them that this world is not all there is. Because Christ had defeated death, they had nothing to fear. God would raise them as well.

It should be noted that God's wrath differs from human wrath. His wrath has nothing to do with uncontrolled anger or temper tantrums. Instead, God's wrath reflects His righteous judgment on sin. When individuals experience His wrath, they are simply reaping the fruit of their choice to go their own way. In contrast, knowing we have avoided God's wrath by accepting Jesus as our substitute on the cross should motivate believers toward a greater appreciation for His grace and mercy.

The Thessalonians' experience provides a fundamental outline of the gospel's impact. They had turned from their old life of idols and had focused on a new life based in the resurrection of Christ. They understood the promise of Christ's return and the consequences of rejecting Him. This was the message of salvation spreading out from Thessalonica. Paul's affirmation of their faithfulness must have encouraged the Thessalonians to press on in their faith walk.

What impact does the resurrection have on your life each day? What can you do to avoid taking Christ's death and resurrection for granted?

VERSE 9

⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God

VERSE 10

¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION

GREET: Prior to group time, write “The Right Direction” on a sheet of paper and display it where everyone can see as they enter the room. Greet the group as they arrive and call attention to the sign directing them to the meeting area. After everyone has arrived, ask: ***When has someone pointed you in the right direction?*** Invite volunteers to share their responses.

OVERVIEW: Read or summarize the first paragraph on page 10 of the PSG.

ASK: ***Who has influenced you the most in your life? Who are you working to mentor today?*** (PSG, p. 10)

TRANSITION: Explain that Paul influenced individuals and groups for the sake of the gospel. Refer again to “The Right Direction” sign and point out that Paul’s life changed direction when He encountered the risen Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). As a result of this encounter, God used Paul to transform the lives of Timothy and Silas. The three of them went on to proclaim the gospel together in Thessalonica, and they too were transformed by the gospel message.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Summarize the Introduction to 1, 2 Thessalonians on pages 10–11 of this leader guide. Lead the group to locate the Outlines of 1, 2 Thessalonians on page 9 of their PSG and point to **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of 1, 2 Thessalonians*) displayed on the wall. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: 1, 2 Thessalonians Time Line*). Briefly overview the time line and encourage the group to keep it with their Bibles or PSGs throughout the study.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read

1 Thessalonians 1:1, and instruct the group to listen for the names of the letter writers and its recipient.

EXAMINE: Invite volunteers to name the people and group mentioned in this verse. Note that Paul was the primary writer, but he included Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy since they had helped plant the church. Summarize the comments under verse 1 in the PSG (p. 12) for background. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Thessalonica in the First Century*) and provide an overview of the setting for 1 Thessalonians.

DISCUSS: ***Why might it have been important for Paul to emphasize the partnership between him, Silas, and Timothy when writing this letter?*** (PSG, p. 12)

GUIDE: Direct attention to the words “grace” and “peace” in verse 1. Point out that the phrasing of *grace* and *peace* was a common greeting of that day. Guide the group to locate the definitions in the comments under verse 1 in the PSG (p. 12).

TRANSITION: *After the greeting in verse 1, the letter begins describing the impact of lives transformed by God.*

READ: Direct the group to read silently **1 Thessalonians 1:2-5a**, looking for ways the Thessalonians evidenced God’s work in their lives.

IDENTIFY: Form three small groups, one to focus on each of these topics: labor, endurance, and hope. Direct the groups to scan the comments on verses 2-5a (PSG, pp. 13–14), looking for information about their assigned topic. Invite a volunteer from each group to share responses.

ASK: *To what evidence might a person point as proof of salvation?* (PSG, p. 14)

TRANSITION: *The church members knew that God’s Spirit was working in and through them because He was actively and powerfully changing them individually and collectively as a church.*

READ: Read **1 Thessalonians 1:5b-8**, and invite the group to observe how the Thessalonians endured and influenced, despite severe persecution.

SHARE: Present a brief summary of the comments about persecution for verses 5b-8. Reference Acts 17:5-10. Point out that the church not only endured, but became an example (v. 7). Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Memory Verses Bookmark*) to use during this study. Draw attention to verse 6, this session’s memory verse.

CLARIFY: Focus on the phrase “imitators of us” (v. 6), which refers to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Emphasize that the church knew how to endure because of their model. Ask: ***How would you define the importance of modeling the Christian life? What is the value of a model who continues to proclaim Christ despite risk?***

GUIDE: Instruct the group to circle the phrase “rang out” in verse 8. Explain that the phrase points to the blasting of a trumpet or to proclaiming with vigor. Stress that the “word of the Lord” was proclaimed despite persecution. The gospel was being shouted through the lives of those enduring the struggle.

DISCUSS: ***How far does your influence for the gospel reach? How can you expand that influence?*** (PSG, p. 16)

TRANSITION: *If the Thessalonian church had turned inward and focused on either temporary or secondary matters, it would have missed its greater purpose.*

READ: Direct the group to read silently **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** and locate references to transformed lives and hope.

GUIDE: Explain that despite persecution, believers in the Thessalonian church recognized the bigger purpose of living for and spreading the gospel. Lead the group to locate the two verbs in verses 9 and 10 that describe the Thessalonian believers’ purpose (“turned” and “wait”). Summarize comments about these verses on page 17 of the PSG. Say: *These believers could wait because they knew that One was coming to rescue them from the wrath to come.*

ASK: ***How does the resurrection of Jesus give a person hope and purpose?*** (PSG, p. 17)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REINFORCE: Remind the group of the introductory activity (identifying someone who pointed them in the right direction). Share that this study demonstrates the impact of influence—how transformed lives impact others for the sake of the gospel. As a group, brainstorm ways believers can strengthen their influence using the four session points for prompts: Partnership, Evidence, Influence, Purpose.

RESPOND: Lead the group to discuss the first question set under Apply the Text on page 18 of the PSG: ***Identify as a group ways of fostering partnerships to expand your influence for Christ within the community. What steps need to be taken to foster these partnerships?***

PRAY: Conclude with prayer, thanking God for the influence of godly believers. Ask Him to help the group evaluate their influence for Christ and reveal ways they can expand that influence as a group and individually.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

MUSIC

Locate a copy of “Send the Light” by Charles H. Gabriel. Play the song or ask a volunteer to read the words to all the verses. Connect the reference to Macedonia in verse 2 with 1 Thessalonians 1:7 and the reference to grace in verse 3 with the Key Doctrine: *God’s Purpose of Grace*.

RESEARCH

Bible atlas, Bible dictionary, study tools

Guide the group to learn more about Thessalonica—the view, history, location, etc. In addition to **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Thessalonica in the First Century*), encourage the use of a Bible atlas, a Bible dictionary, and other study tools. Allow volunteers to share the additional information they collected. Use the discussion to give greater context about the Thessalonian church.

TESTIMONY

Pre-enlist a volunteer to share about an experience in which he or she was positively influenced by another person in his or her Christian walk. If the other person is available to join your group time, consider asking both of them to share. Focus on how the relationship was established and identify specific aspects of the example or actions that made a difference. Lead the group to prayerfully consider someone they feel led to reach for the gospel.

PRESENTATION

Prepare a presentation based on **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Paul’s Second Missionary Journey*) and Acts 16–18 to be used in conjunction with the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 15). Review Acts 16–18 for the group, examining the different experiences Paul had in each city on his journey. Share this insight as you point out key locations on the **Pack Item 1** map.

WRITE

Note cards and pens

Distribute note cards and pens and lead the group to write notes to individuals who have influenced their Christian walk. Encourage them to be specific about how the other person’s actions influenced their relationship with Christ and motivated them to have that same kind of influence in someone else’s life.

CASE STUDY

Place the group into teams of three. Direct each team to develop a case study based on an example of believers working in partnership (a person, group, or event), and how this partnership furthers the work of the gospel. As teams present their studies, write characteristics mentioned on a board. Discuss how these characteristics can help your group impact others for the sake of the gospel.