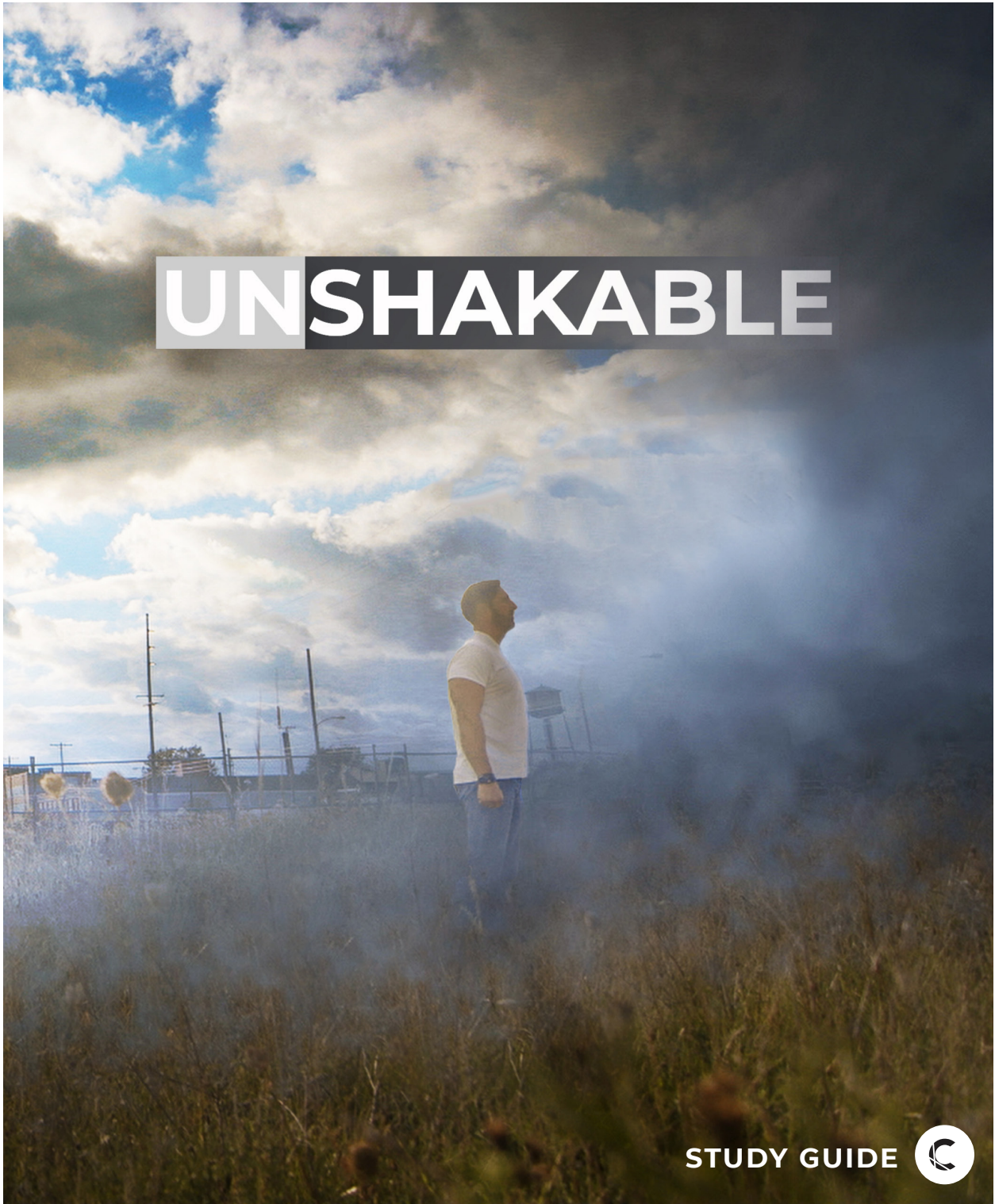


UNSHAKABLE



STUDY GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

The Thessalonian church was unshakable. They were unflinching in the face of opposition because they were anticipating the coming of Christ. We are to be unshakable too and 1 Thessalonians helps us toward that end.

Sometimes expectant mothers are said to “nest.” That is, they are anxiously and excitedly getting ready for their baby. So, they do various “nesting” things. They paint, organize, or just generally clean. They are excited about their baby’s arrival, and they want to be ready, so they prepare. Or back in the day when people used to send letters to one another, people would excitedly check the mail, even multiple times a day. It wasn’t just bills, junk mail, or your neighbor’s mail. The letter from your friend (or the person you’re dating!) could come!

Being expectant makes a positive difference in your everyday life. Paul is telling the Thessalonians to live with expectancy. And we are to live with expectancy too. Whatever our situation, whatever our challenges, something good is on the horizon. Jesus will soon make everything bright and beautiful. The darkness of the world will be eclipsed with His glory and love.

When we live with expectancy for the coming of Christ’s perfect Kingdom, we live with purpose and passion. When we live with expectancy, we’re like a child before Christmas. The night might be long and grueling, but the morning brings the joy of presents. For the Christian, life might be long and grueling, but in His presence, there is joy eternal.

Living with expectancy makes all the difference in the world. It makes us unshakable.

DATE

Paul wrote this letter on his second missionary journey, around the year 51. So, this letter was written just twenty years after Jesus’ death. This makes 1 Thessalonians likely the earliest letter that we have that Paul wrote.

BACKGROUND

Acts 17 tells us about the founding of the church in Thessalonica. Paul, Silas, and Timothy took a three-day, hundred-mile journey from Philippi to Thessalonica where their evangelistic efforts brought some Jews and many Greeks to salvation. Many Jews, however, became jealous and caused a big uproar and sought to find Paul and his coworkers. But they couldn’t find Paul and his close associates because the Christian brothers and sisters had sent Paul and Silas away to

Berea. And so, the mob dragged off Jason and some of the other Christians and brought them before the city authorities and told them: “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here. And they are saying there is another king other than Caesar, King Jesus.”

LOCATION

Thessalonica was a commercial center and was the capital of Macedonia. It was likely around the size of Akron, Ohio. Today, Thessalonica is the second biggest city in Greece. It has an ideal location which contributed to its growth and is even now an important seaport.

There were people in the city of Thessalonica that worshipped the emperor as a demigod or deity. There was also worship of Aphrodite, Athene, Apollo, Heracles, and Zeus. So, to claim that Jesus was the one true Lord in that context was not popular.

Yet, that’s just what the Christians did. Just as the Thessalonians faced challenges, we do too. And just like they needed exhorted and encouraged, we do too.

KEY THEMES

Faithfulness

The Thessalonians had steadfast hope in the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3). They were faithful and even flourishing despite the opposition they were facing (1:6). Indeed, they were setting the pace for their region (v. 7-8).

Eschatology

Paul puts the persecution and hostility that the Christians are facing into proper perspective by reminding them about the return of Christ. In fact, he brings up the coming of Christ multiple times (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15, 16; 5:2, 23). He also reminds the Thessalonians that it is not Caesar that brings “peace and security,” it is Christ (5:3).

Holiness

1 Thessalonians teaches us that God has called us to live set apart in every area of our lives, including our sexual lives (4:3-7). And if we disregard God’s calling on our lives, we are not disregarding a mere human, but God (v. 8).

The popular claim was that Caesar was king. Whereas Christians claimed Jesus was King (Acts 17:7). And so, He must be obeyed. We are called to live godly lives knowing that Jesus will return and soon reign on earth as He does in heaven.

So, we see that 1 Thessalonians calls us to perseverance, purity, and preparedness until Christ’s return.

STATS

- 5 chapters
- 89 verses
- 7 mentions or allusions to the coming of Christ (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15, 16; 5:2, 23)

VERSES TO MEMORIZE

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.”

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

If you were going to write an open letter to the church, what would you say?

How would you encourage and exhort the church?

The city of Thessalonica was not a Christian city. What do you think were some of the challenges that Christians faced there (think about the political life, the work life, home life, and the religious culture)?

What are some similarities and differences between the challenges that the Christians faced in Thessalonica and that we face today? How did Paul's letter help them to face some of those challenges?

Why was Thessalonica a strategic place to share the gospel?

UNSHAKABLE

A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS



WEEK 1: CELEBRATION OF FAITHFULNESS

1 THESSALONIANS 1

Have you ever mentored someone? Maybe it was a younger sibling or cousin. Maybe it was an apprentice at work or a first-time mother who needed some advice. Relationships like these often bond people together in a special way. In 1 Thessalonians, we read about this type of bond between Paul and the people in the church at Thessalonica. Paul, Silas (Silvanus was his Roman name), and Timothy had planted a church there. This letter is a celebration of the Thessalonians' faithfulness that had continued after Paul and his team had left.

Why was this bond special? Paul explains this in verse 3. They remembered the progression of the Thessalonians' discipleship, specifically their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. Their work of faith was the change that God had done in their hearts and that they were continuing to live out. They had been idol worshippers, but now were worshiping the true God. Their labor of love meant that they did not keep their faith quiet or personal but displayed it in love for those around them. Steadfastness of hope meant that they were unwavering despite difficult circumstances and surroundings. They put their full trust in Jesus. One Bible commentary describes the Greek word steadfastness as bearing up patiently under a large strain.

Paul and his team weren't the only ones who thought the Thessalonian people were special. They are described as brothers, part of God's family, as well as loved by God and chosen. These are words the Bible also uses to describe us. Salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ makes these words descriptive of all Christ followers. Paul goes on to set apart the Thessalonians as people filled with power, the Holy Spirit, and conviction. These are also descriptions of all those who follow Christ.

Where did the Thessalonians learn how to live out their faith? They modeled after Paul, Silas, and Timothy who were modeling the life of Christ. Also, of key significance is that the Thessalonians became an example of how to live for others to imitate. They did so in such a way that “the word of the Lord sounded forth” from them and their “faith in God has gone forth everywhere” (1 Thess. 1:8). What an amazing description of their testimony.

Do you like waiting? Me neither. But it is commanded in scripture for us many times. At the end of this chapter, Paul lays out a challenge to the Thessalonians to wait. They are to wait in faith until the return of Christ who will come back to deliver them from the wrath to come. We are also awaiting that return with anticipation and hope.

Paul, through his encouragement of the Thessalonians, has scripted a playbook for us on how to live out our faith. I pray that you and I do so in a way that imitates Christ, shows our response to the unmerited favor God has shown us, and sounds forth to others so that we are an example until He returns.

DAILY STUDY

☐ **DAY 1** (Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3, 1 Corinthians 13:13)

What three things does Paul remember about the Thessalonian people when he prays for them? Why do you think these are so important? How can you use each day to display these three characteristics?

☐ **DAY 2** (Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

The Thessalonians were described as chosen people of God. The nation of Israel was often described this same way. As followers of Christ, we are chosen by God also. Take some time to thank God for saving you from the wrath you deserved and for the grace He provided through Jesus. Write a short prayer of thanksgiving.

☐ **DAY 3** (Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

Who are some people who have been spiritual role models for you? Thank God for them now and pray for their continued faithfulness. List out some of the characteristics that you see in them. Send them a note of encouragement and try to model their Christ-like example today.

○ **DAY 4** (Read 1 Thessalonians 1:8)

Are you living in such a way that the word of God sounds forth from you? If so, how? Stay steadfast in that. If not, pick one or two ways to live out your faith today. Be bold! Write this verse down and refer to it often today as both an encouragement and a challenge.

○ **DAY 5** (Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they were once idol worshippers. What has God delivered you from in your life? Look at how faithful He has been. Write down one or two examples of His faithfulness in your life. As we wait for what He is going to do, don't forget what He has already done.



WEEK 2: CHALLENGE TO REMAIN FAITHFUL

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-16

Paul and his coworkers dared to share the good news of Jesus even though it was unpopular (2:2) and the Thessalonian church happened as a result.

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt pretty good about yourself but then you just totally get put to shame? I was in a pie baking contest and my pie looked and smelled amazing. I went above and beyond and even made a fancy lattice top. It looked incredible. Or so I thought...

I didn't win. I thought there was no possible way that the pie competition could stand a chance. But I was wrong. And the worse thing is, my father-in-law won. So, anytime there's pie at a family event, I must eat humble pie.

I think 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 has a very humbling effect, when we really consider the passage. The humbling comes not by comparing pies though; it comes through looking at Paul. Read through the passage. What are some things that stick out to you? Highlight or underline those things.

Paul's Concern for People

Something that sticks out to me is Paul's overwhelming concern for other people, the Christian saints in Thessalonica. Look at 2:7-8, 11: Paul says he's like a nursing mother and like a father with his children. Paul had to leave Thessalonians because of persecution, and he says he was "torn away" (1 Thess. 2:17).

Paul cared so much for the Thessalonians, in fact, that he was willing to be left alone in Athens so that Timothy could check in with them. Paul even said, "you are our glory and joy" (v. 20).

Is that how you think about other Christian brothers and sisters in your life? Or does Paul have something to teach you too? I know as I read his words, I'm eating humble pie.

Paul's Concern for Presence

Paul had a heart for people, but he wanted to be with them "in person" (v. 17). He had a great desire to see them "face to face" (v. 17, 3:10). Paul wanted to come to them (v. 18). Why do you think physical presence was so important to Paul? Is it important to you? What are some blessings of technology that we should thank God for? And what are some of the hindrances of technology?

Paul's Concern for Perseverance

Paul knows that the Christian journey is not easy. He and his coworkers themselves shared the good news of Jesus amid much opposition (2:2). Yet, Paul wants the Thessalonians to be unshakable. He wants them to persevere.

Paul wants to remind followers of Jesus that we are not promised that it will be easy. In fact, Paul says we're destined for suffering (3:3-4). But in Paul's letter, he does provide a basis to help us stand unshaken. Paul, repeatedly, reminds us of "the coming of our Lord Jesus" (3:13).

How should the reality of the coming of Christ help us cultivate concern for other people (see v. 19)? How should Christ's future coming (the experience of His full presence) affect how we think about being present with others? Why does being "face to face" matter? Lastly, how does remembering that King Jesus will soon return to set up His eternal Kingdom encourage us to persevere and endure?

DAILY STUDY

☐ **DAY 1** (Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16)

What are some things from 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 that stick out to you? What do you find encouraging and what do you find challenging?

☐ **DAY 2** (Read 2 John 12; 3 John 13-14; Hebrews 10:19-25)

John, Paul, and the author of Hebrews, all think personal presence is important. Why? What are some advantages to being physically present? Do you prioritize being physically present with other Christians?

☐ **DAY 3** (Read 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 3:5; John 10:10)

How does Satan, the tempter, seek to destroy us? Read Eph. 6:10-20 and Heb. 3:12-13. What are some ways we can be protected from Satan’s attacks?

○ **DAY 4** (Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3:13)

Highlight or underline every reference to suffering in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13. What do we learn about suffering?

○ **DAY 5** (Read at least four of these verses: Matthew 5:10-12; 10:22; Acts 14:22; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 3:13-18; 5:10-11)

Does the Bible promise health, wealth, and prosperity? What does the Bible promise in this life for Christians? What motivation do Christians have to endure suffering?



WEEK 3: CHALLENGE TO PERSEVERE

1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-3:13

In this passage, Paul's heart for the brothers and sisters at the church of Thessalonica is evident. Paul "eagerly" desired to see his fellow workers of the gospel, but Satan had hindered his joy. Paul's love for the believers is profoundly compared to his crown of boasting before Jesus Himself in verse 19. Paul even connects the love for the Church to being holy before God at the coming of Jesus. Obviously, love for brothers and sisters in Christ is massively important and eternally significant to God!

Through the hardship that Paul and his associates had been facing for the sake of the gospel, Paul is encouraged through Timothy's experience with the believers at Thessalonica. Paul writes as he experiences a communal joy through the mutual desire and love for one another between Paul and the church. This is a theme seen often in Paul's letters...the joy of serving with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, being refreshed by one another's commitment, and ultimately energized by God's faithfulness in using them.

There is a love within this community of believers that is unique, and honestly shocking, considering the culture they lived in. Today, in the 21st century, God's people are still called to interact with one another like this. If we were to love our brothers and sisters like Paul and Timothy did, how would that look to those around us? How would that love stir in others a desire to belong to an eternal family? How would it make them want to know the King who has instilled this love into them?

Paul describes how he had sent Timothy to be an encouragement to the church of Thessalonica. He sent him specifically to encourage and “exhort” them in their faith, that they may work and live for Christ, even amid afflictions. How does Paul’s desire to encourage and exhort the church reveal his heart for the church? It seems that Paul believes there is a responsibility to encourage and stir one another to live for Christ (Heb. 10:24-25). Is this a responsibility that you take seriously?

Oftentimes, when reading passages like this, it can be easy to wonder why we don’t always interact with the Church of Christ like Paul. But the reality is, this love for the Church is not natural to Paul but is something that God stirred in him and brought about. Pray that God would stir in your heart an affection for your brothers and sisters in Christ and pray that for others in the church community as well.

1. What are ways that you are building up and loving the brothers and sisters in Christ around you?
2. How often do you find yourself praying for the church? Is this something that you can do more of?
3. What are practical ways that you can make time to delight in being with those around you?
4. Spend time in prayer for your family in Christ...take time to consider the ways that God is using them. Consider writing them a note of encouragement.

DAILY STUDY

☐ **DAY 1** (Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20)

In this passage, Paul describes how he has been “torn away” from being with the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica. Can you think of a person that you miss and long to see? Take time to pray for them, and even reach out to them if able.

☐ **DAY 2** (Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

Have you ever considered that God uses people as His “coworker” (1 Thess. 3:2) to supply what is lacking in people’s faith (v. 10)? What might it look like for you to do this?

How does viewing the church as one unit and family change the way you interact with other brothers and sisters in Christ? Spend time in prayer, praying for brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing affliction. Pray that the tempter would not triumph in their lives but that they would be steadfast and faithful to what God has called them to.

☐ **DAY 3** (Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8)

Paul writes that Timothy had returned and shared the “good news” of the church of Thessalonica’s faith amid hardship. If someone were to get a report from your life, would they see it as faithful? Or distracted from God’s calling?

Why did Paul send Timothy in the first place? Just to check up on the church, like a dad, or was there something deeper? Perhaps the Church has been designed intentionally to require encouragement from one another and to act as a unit together.

○ **DAY 4** (Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10)

Paul's "earnestness" in praying for the church of Thessalonica, that he may be able to see their face, is a powerful picture of the love and joy that can be felt between brothers and sisters in Christ. Is this a joy that you experience? Why or why not?

○ **DAY 5** (Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all..." What a powerful prayer! What does this prayer mean? What is Paul praying for? Why does Paul pray it? Is this a prayer that you can pray, that God would work this way in your heart today?

Spend time in prayer.



WEEK 4: CHALLENGE TO BE HOLY

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12

This passage is a transition in Paul's letter. He begins to clearly illustrate the exhortation that was largely veiled in the previous passages. It feels as though this section is an abrupt shift in the letter's theme. But Paul had earlier referred to an element of the Thessalonian's faith that may have been lacking (1 Thess. 3:10) and foreshadowed the exhortation of this passage in the preceding prayer's conclusion (3:12-13).

Paul challenges the Thessalonians to lead a life of holiness (4:1). This challenge to be holy is not from the mind of men, rather, it is rooted in the authority and character of Jesus Christ whom the Thessalonians had earlier received in the gospel message (1:5, 2:13). The Thessalonians had been chosen by God; Paul even notes the indisputable evidence that they had received the gospel (1:4-5).

Paul's challenge to be holy is not optional for the Christian. It is required and commanded by God so that we may be like Him (Lev 11:44-45; 1 Pet 1:15-16). It is the process of growing in holiness, or sanctification, that conforms the believer more and more to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29). As the believer is sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the word of God (2 Thess. 2:13; Jn 17:17) they are "set apart and removed from the world in their conduct."¹ The Christian, however, must be exposed to truth, believe the truth, and live it out in their daily lives to grow in holiness (2 Thess. 2:13; Jn 17:17).

Paul notes two important points in this passage regarding his challenge for the church to be holy. The first is regarding sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3). Throughout the Bible, this specific category of sin is particularly grievous. Paul directly identifies sexual immorality as one of many regressive effects of idolatry (Rom 1:18-32). And rightly so; the evidence is visible in our world today as so many experience sexual brokenness, which is the fallout from a sexualized culture that has been weaponized by the enemy. This is nothing new. The culture of Thessalonica was much the same as ours because adultery, sexual misconduct, prostitution, sex slavery, and pagan cultic prostitution were considered normal and even encouraged. The Thessalonians in the church had been exposed to such ungodly and destructive practices and some had taken part.

Paul uses the Greek word πορνεία (porneia) for sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3). This word represents every practice that abuses God's design for sexuality. He reminds the Thessalonians that God has not called them to such practices, but rather to live in holiness (1 Thess. 4:7). In the same way, we are called to abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Cor 6:18) because these practices disturb God's intention and design for human sexuality while leaving those involved broken.

Paul urges the Thessalonians to control their bodies in holiness (1 Thess. 4:4). As mentioned earlier, that includes abstaining from sexual immorality, however, it also incorporates glorifying God with a proper sexual ethic. God designed human sexuality to be a beautiful thing enjoyed between a man and woman within the confines of marriage (Gen 2:24).

Paul also urges the church to live in brotherly love (1 Thess. 4:9). Living lives of love is a big part of what it looks like for Christians to live set apart.

DAILY STUDY

☐ **DAY 1** (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2)

Why does Paul “urge” (4:1) us to obey? How does God reveal how we “ought to walk”?

☐ **DAY 2** (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

How is the message of these verses different than what culture says? Verse 6 says, “The Lord is an avenger.” Is that a good thing? What are your reflections on that question and this passage?

☐ **DAY 3** (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12)

How has God taught us to love? What are some passages in the Bible that have been especially instructive for you regarding love? How are you doing in loving others?

○ **DAY 4** (Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13)

2 Thessalonians 2:15 says, “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught.” Why is the teaching of the Church important? Do you know, and are you holding tightly to, the teachings of the Church?

○ **DAY 5** (Read John 17:17)

Culture often says, “What is truth?” Or, “How can we know what’s true?” or “We all just have our personal beliefs.” Yet, what does the Bible say is true? What impact should God’s truth have? How are you being transformed by God’s truth?



WEEK 5: ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FACE OF DEATH

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

This passage gives us an eternal perspective. Paul is encouraging us to remember that we don't have the same finality of those who don't know Christ. We know that we will spend eternity in the presence of God in paradise. Therefore, we should not grieve like those who do not know Christ. For them, this world is all they have. There is not a glorious eternity to look forward to, only a now.

This passage is one that is filled with hope! It not only paints a picture of the future with Christ's return but is an encouragement to rest in the comfort that believing in Christ brings. As believers in Christ, we do not have to worry about what is on the other side of bodily death. We will be with the Lord and His people forever.

Part of the hope mentioned here refers to those who are believers who have passed away. Paul reminds us that because they believed in Christ, they are also in the presence of the Lord for eternity. They are living out the hope we look forward to. When Jesus returns all those in Him will praise Him forever in the new Kingdom!

God's eternity is better than anything we can imagine now. This passage starts by talking about how we will have new bodies in eternity! Some people tend to ask questions about those bodies.

What age will they be? Will we still have differences like skin, hair, and eye color? Will I finally have a decent singing voice?! Paul is reminding us here that these questions don't matter. Our Heavenly bodies are beyond our comprehension and will be the least of our concerns when we are in the presence of God.

Although this passage is an encouragement not to worry, it should invoke an urgency in us to tell those we love and interact with about the hope found in Christ. Because of Jesus, we have more than just the highs and lows of today. We have an eternal perspective that cannot be tainted by the pains of today. Who could you share this hope with?

DAILY STUDY

☐ **DAY 1** (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Why is it important that we “should not be uninformed about those who are asleep?” Why does Paul want us to be well-informed about the sure hope of resurrection? What does it look like for you to let the remembrance of the Lord’s return give you hope in your daily life?

☐ **DAY 2** (Read John 11)

This story is a fantastic reminder of Jesus’ humanity and love. It also shows Jesus’ power over death. Jesus taught His followers about His return, and the resurrection of the dead. In reading this story, how are you encouraged by Jesus’ power?

Jesus reminds those in this story that if they believe in Him, they will see the glory of God. How has your belief in Him shown you His Glory? What has He transformed in your life? How has He set you free?

☐ **DAY 3** (Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11)

We need to be reminded of our hope. Sometimes it can be easy to get discouraged in the struggles of life and forget the hope that we have. Do you need to be reminded of the gospel and how it has set you free? Who could you encourage with the gospel today?

This passage lays out a reminder of the basics of the gospel. How easily could you share the hope that you have? Write out how you would explain the gospel to someone who has never heard it before.

○ **DAY 4** (Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-34)

In the beginning of this section, Paul is writing about those who do not believe in the resurrection. It can be easy to not have faith in something so amazing when life gets hard. Discuss or write out some pitfalls that make you forget or doubt your belief in Christ and the power of the gospel in your life.

This passage claims that death is an enemy of Christ and that He has power over it! That is a big claim! What are some things in your life that you need to hand over to Jesus? He has the power to overcome it!

○ **DAY 5** (Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-58)

Take some time to write down or discuss what you are most excited about for heaven. What will you be healed of? What will you celebrate?

This passage encourages us to remain faithful and hopeful in the Lord. Even though the world is dark and painful, we have hope in an eternal, holy, all-powerful God who loves us, and that cannot be shaken. Take some time to pray and thank God for His care and love for you. Then take a moment to find a token of remembrance. Something for you to look at, hold, or touch as a reminder of God's power, faithfulness, and love.



WEEK 6: ENCOURAGEMENT IN LIGHT OF CHRIST'S RETURN

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

The coming return of the Lord Jesus Christ, as we have seen, is a repeated theme and source of motivation. 1 Thessalonians has already discussed one aspect of the return of Jesus: what happens with those “who have fallen asleep” (4:14) when Jesus returns? This section (1 Thess. 5:1-11) transitions to (note “now concerning”) the timing of Jesus’ return (“the times and seasons”). Paul responds to that question, and he tells the Thessalonians how they should live in light of Christ’s coming.

We see in 1 Thessalonians and throughout the New Testament that eschatology (i.e., the teaching on end times) is not mainly about charts and predictions of when the end will happen. Rather, it is about worship, longing, and hoping. It is about crying out, “How long, O’ Lord?!” (Rev. 6:10) and “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

Eschatology should produce motivation. Motivation to not live for this world that will soon be dissolved but for one that is unfading (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4; 2 Pet. 3:10-12). When we hope in Christ’s return, we are motivated to be pure as He is pure (1 Jn. 3:3). Motivation to labor diligently and constantly because our Master is expected at any time (Matt. 24:36ff; 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:1-2). We are to constantly remind ourselves of His nearing advent and of the feast we shall share with Him (Matt. 26:29; Mk.14:25; Lk. 22:16; 1 Cor.11:26; Rev. 19:9).

Of course, there are many respectable views on the subject of Christ's return. We, however, should not be overly dogmatic about how and when exactly the return of Jesus will happen (Mk.13:32), but that it will happen and will be glorious. And that it should motivate us as we seek to live faithful lives here as exiles waiting for our blessed hope. We should be like the Bereans (Acts 17:11). We should know and search the scriptures; but we should not have every jot and tittle of eschatology rigidly lined out to a "t."

The primary thrust of eschatology in scripture is ethical. Peter, for example, reminds us that since the present world will be dissolved, we should not live for this world but the next. And thus have morals shaped by the next Kingdom and not this evil one (2 Peter 3:11cf. 1 Cor. 7:26, 29). Again, we "purify ourselves as He is pure," why? Because we eagerly await the return of Jesus (Phil. 3:20; 2 Peter 3:12; 1 Jn. 3:3). Thus, eschatology is not primarily about hanging up charts that map out when Jesus will return, we clearly cannot know the exact timing. It's about being found ready when He does come (Matt. 24).

We can be sure that since Christ was resurrected from the grave and was the "first fruits" that we also will be raised. Therefore, we are told to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58)! When we remember that we too will be raised and receive glorified bodies and enjoy God forever, we are motivated to labor for the Lord.

We need to remember that the end of the story and the main point of eschatology is to show that God through Jesus the Messiah is victorious! This truth encouraged John who wrote Revelation and who was exiled on Patmos and all the churches that were being persecuted to whom the letter went. If we read about eschatology, especially in that context, we will respond not mainly with a certain view of how everything will happen, but by saying, "Come Lord Jesus, Come"!

May we meditate on eschatology; but may it change not merely our view of the end times, but our ethics—how we live and how we love! May we live unshaken for our Savior as we look to His return!

DAILY STUDY

○ DAY 1 (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8)

In 1 Thessalonians 5, why do the Thessalonians not need anything written to them concerning the time of Jesus' return? Look at what verse 2 says. What will it be like when "the day of the Lord" comes?

What is meant by the contrast of day and night, and light and dark in verses 4-5? What is the difference between keeping awake and sleeping, and being sober and being drunk? What is meant by this contrast in verses 6-8?

○ DAY 2 (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11)

What motivation are we given to live sober lives in verses 9-10 (notice the conjunction "for" in v. 9)? How and why should this motivate us to live sober lives?

Why is encouragement so important (v. 11)? Why would the return of Christ be encouraging? Is eschatology encouraging to you, confusing, or scary?

○ DAY 3 (Read 2 Peter 3:1-7)

Peter is seeking to stimulate those he's writing to, so that they will think rightly (v. 10). Why is thinking rightly so important?

Have you ever heard people scoff and mock the Christian faith (v. 3)? In what way is people's "sinful desires" often related to their scoffing at Christianity? What is the problem in the hypothetical scoffers reasoning in v. 4? What are the scoffers purposely overlooking (see v. 5-7)?

○ **DAY 4** (Read 2 Peter 3:8-13)

Why, based on 2 Peter 3, has Jesus not come back yet and brought judgment upon the world?

What practical, life-changing impact is eschatology (the Bible's teaching on last things) supposed to have on the way we live? Is your hope set on the world that is, or the world that Jesus will bring?

○ **DAY 5** (Read 2 Peter 3:14-18)

What are you waiting for? Your life to be “just right”—the new job, car, phone, relationship—or are you waiting for the new heavens and the new earth? Or is that too vague of a concept for you? How can you work to make the reality of heaven more real and motivational in your life?

Do you care about what Jesus thinks about you, or what the world thinks about you (v. 14)?

Why is it dangerous when people twist and spin the scriptures to fit their own agenda? Are you being careful, and do you hold firmly to the truth so that you're not deceived and led to unstable ground? Are you purposely working towards growth in Christ (v. 18)?

WEEK 7: CONCLUDING ENCOURAGEMENT

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-28

This is the final section of Paul's letter, and it seems quite chaotic. As if he's completed the letter and is writing a P.S. ("Postscript") to include topics he forgot to mention. When you read the passage, it also seems scattered and rushed, like Paul was running out of time to finish writing before he had to leave the house! However, Paul was in his right mind and intentional when these final instructions were written. Instead of ending with the theology of the coming of Jesus, Paul ends with practical application of the Christian life, both within the church and the world.

In our current cultural climate, respect for authority or authority structures is dwindling. Along with that, trust and assuming the best in these establishments is flying out the window. Some of it with good reason. In the last 20 years alone, there's been Government corruption, scandals within the Church, child grooming within the Boy Scouts, and the list could go on. Though this may be true, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the congregation is structured and there is God-ordained leadership that is to be honored. This is not supposed to be a power game, nor submission out of fear, but of loving respect. Why? The humble shepherding that church pastors and leaders are called to is worthy of it!

Jesus said to the disciples that whoever would be first in the Kingdom would be a slave to all, even as Jesus Himself came not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many (cf. Matt 20:27-28)! The problem for some is we can throw the baby out with the bath water and assume that every leader has the same character flaws or selfish motivations of those who have been found guilty of scandals. The main goal of the shepherd is for their sheep, not against them. When both parties are doing their part, there is Spirit-produced peace within the community!

Paul reminds the readers how they are to interact with each other. It's interesting that he speaks of our responsibility to one another before he mentions what we're called to individually! This highlights one of the greatest weaknesses of the church in America: individualism. We focus so much on our own spirituality and health and seek not to aid in our sister's growth or call out our brother's sin.

Paul strikes at our interpersonal relationships before the internal. He points us to point others to the ideal standard, Jesus! Jesus was not idle or lazy, nor did he encourage others to be. He encouraged those who were fearful of the world or suffering, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). He called others to “come to me all those who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). Jesus showed an incredible amount of patience, especially with His disciples, who were slow to comprehend His teachings, the Kingdom, and ultimately His death and resurrection. We as Christ’s body are to encourage and exhort one another to Christlikeness in every area of our life, whether it be our work ethic or our suffering, our use of spiritual gifts or struggle with sin, and to do all of this with patience and goodness, not anger or evil.

Many people ask the question, “What is God’s will?” Or more specifically, “What is His will for my life?” Right here Paul gives a quick quip, not about the direction to go in life, but how we’re called to go about life. Rejoice. Pray. Give Thanks. Boom! With no explanation, Paul says that God’s will for every believer is to be joyous, prayerful, and thankful. This might seem to be an impossible standard, but his point is that we should have a general attitude of rejoicing, praying, and being thankful. When we are committed to being a people whose bedrock is joy, prayer, and gratitude to God, we become a light to the world and show others there is a better way because of Jesus!

It’s important to put out a fire before you leave your house, but when the fire is the very source of your life (the Spirit!); not a great idea! And we can be prone to putting out the Spirit’s flame in our life, grieving Him. Paul also says that we should not be cynical about every preacher or teacher of the faith. A prophet is one who proclaims the word of God. Rather, like we do with other things, we are called to evaluate what has been said, taking in what was meat, that is, what aligns with the rest of scripture and gospel and throw away the bones! We should not be gullible, believing everything we hear, nor too cynical, believing nothing we hear! And how do we grow in our discernment between meat and bone? By growing in godliness and abstaining from evil (Heb. 5:14).

At this point, we can be defeated before we start. How can we do all of this? Paul ends with the encouragement, that it is God who will make us holy, who will keep us blameless, who will strengthen us to do His will, His way, for His glory! Our role is to humbly seek to be used by God and by His Spirit, He will do the rest!

DAILY STUDY

○ DAY 1 (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

Do you struggle with authority figures? Is it difficult to submit or give them the benefit of the doubt? Why do you think that is? How does that affect your view of the Church?

How do you view those who are in pastoral leadership? What is the work that God has entrusted to them? Is there ever a time when you shouldn't respect or esteem them?

How can you show loving respect or esteem for your shepherds in Christ?

○ DAY 2 (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15)

When you gather with other believers, are you viewing it as an opportunity for self or service? Is there thought of helping others grow or how you can grow?

Paul gives three examples of people who can be difficult to love: the idle, fainthearted, and weak. Can you think of those types of people in your life that need encouragement, reproved, or help? Why is it difficult to be patient with them?

We seek justice instinctively. Often though, we seek it on our own terms and in our own timing. Paul, echoing Jesus' own teaching, calls the Thessalonians to repay no one "evil for evil" but seek to do good to everyone. Can you reflect on times in the past month you've sought to return evil for evil? What is a way to do good when you've been wronged?

○ DAY 3 (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Have you ever asked God what His will was for you? What direction He wanted you to go? What decision He wanted you to make? It's common for us to seek such guidance from Him! And yet, throughout most of scripture, He tells us how to go about life, not where to go in life.

How can Paul say to "rejoice always"? Aren't there moments in life where we should mourn? What does he mean by this? Why can we rejoice even in the worst moments of life?

Paul tells us to “give thanks in all circumstances.” Reflect on your life, have you had seasons where you’ve been ungrateful? What about where you’ve had an “attitude of gratitude”? How did your life look different? Why is it so important to give thanks always?

○ **DAY 4** (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)

In what ways do you think you, others, or the Church “quenches the Spirit”? What are certain actions or mindsets that contribute to this?

Paul talks about denying or despising prophecies. Have you been guilty of this? Have you tended to turn away from the preaching of God’s word? What has caused this? Or, are you more prone to consume everything that is taught? Paul warns that we must “test everything” and only hold fast to that which is “good.” What does that mean?

○ **DAY 5** (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28)

When you read these questions...do your devotions and seek to live a life pleasing to the Lord, is it daunting? Does it seem difficult and unobtainable? There’s good news, it’s God’s job to grow you and complete you! Is this difficult to believe? Why or why not?

Paul encourages the Thessalonians that it is because God is faithful that He will do it (cf. Phil 1:6). How can this be an encouragement to you in your life?



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