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THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2022

Unit: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Theme: Walk Worthy

Overview: The Christian experience is often referred to as a journey, pilgrimage, battle, or race. One of the major metaphors for following Jesus is *walk* (meaning, “live this way”). And this *walk* is more like a march than a stroll. Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians are likely among the earliest New Testament documents, and the word *walk* occurs six times in those letters. In this unit students will learn how that walk is motivated by love, how it requires endurance and spiritual alertness, and how people who take this walk can leverage their time.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

LESSON AIM: Walk worthy in a tireless labor of love, acting with holiness, righteousness, and blamelessness.

LESSON TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10; 1 Timothy 4:10

Vertical tabs on the right side of the page indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

APPLICATION: Don't give up on the church. The church is the body of Christ, and we are members of it. We should not give up on the church because it is the place where we can grow in our faith and love for God and others.

DISCOVERY:

1. Do you believe in the church? Why or why not?
2. How do you think the church should be run?
3. What are some of the challenges the church faces today?
4. How can we better support the church?
5. What are some of the ways we can love the church?
6. How can we better love the church?
7. How can we better love the church?
8. How can we better love the church?
9. How can we better love the church?
10. How can we better love the church?

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JULY 10, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Walk worthy by enduring
hardship sustained by faith.**

UNIT: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

THEME: Walk Worthy

LESSON TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:13

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Philippians 1:25-30; Colossians 1:9-12;
Hebrews 12:1-3

STUDY

ENDURANCE INSPIRED BY FAITH

BY MARK SCOTT

It's been said that the Christian life is not a sprint but a marathon. Anyone can start. The question is, "Can one finish?" Races are won at the tape—not in the blocks. Even the writer of Hebrews emphasized this when he said, "Let us run with endurance the race set before us" (12:1).

One thing hindering the Thessalonian believers from enduring the race was confusion about the end times and return of Christ. Confusion about the future caused them uncertainty in the present. They needed some details about the future, but only so it would empower them to live well in the present by enduring any kind of suffering. Every chapter of Thessalonian correspondence says something about the return of Christ. Eschatology in the New Testament is more often tuned to Christian ethics than to predictions about world events.

Endurance Helps Us Suffer Affliction

1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:5

Paul loved the Thessalonian believers. In fact, he loved them so much that being separated from them seemed to him like being *orphaned*. He had an *intense longing* to see them. More than once he wanted to *come to* them. These people were Paul's *hope, joy, crown, and glory*. Paul even used Timothy to close the gap between the Thessalonians and himself. Shortly after Paul's trip to Berea and Athens (Acts 17), Timothy was dispatched to see how the Thessalonians were doing.

Paul recognized that he was in a battle with an archenemy, *Satan (or the tempter)*, for the Thessalonians. Satan was who *blocked* (struck down) Paul's way to the saints. Satan was who would attempt to derail the believers from being strengthened and encouraged in the faith. Satan was who would tempt people and cause Paul to feel he had labored in vain. Timothy's report would help allay Paul's fears.

The Thessalonians probably needed to get more comfortable with the idea of suffering affliction. Not only had Paul warned Christians about this previously (and now again in this Epistle), but he even went on to say

that they were *destined* (placed or set) for this. It might be that Christians should be surprised when they are not suffering. But endurance causes us to bear up under any affliction.

Endurance Helps Us Stand Fast

1 Thessalonians 3:6–13

Paul worried about the believers in Thessalonica. He waited for word from Timothy about how the Christians there were enduring. Timothy brought a good report. He brought *good news* (the word for evangelism) of the Thessalonians' *faith and love*. Evidently the Thessalonian believers felt the same way about Paul too. Even though Paul admitted to being in *distress and persecution*, he found himself *encouraged* (comforted) by Timothy's report. The Thessalonians' faith was growing.

Verse 8 is key in this section. Paul said, "For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord." To "stand firm" means to be constant or persevere. To some extent, Paul's spiritual barometer was in sync with the well-being of the people he had brought to Christ. Paul was grateful to God for their progress in the faith. This brought Paul much *joy*. It increased his desire to see the people. It also energized his prayers for them *night and day*. If there was anything lacking in their faith, Paul wanted to *supply* it.

Paul ended this tender section of the Epistle with a significant benediction or blessing (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Paul prayed that God would *clear the way* (make straight) so he and his companions could come to them. He also desired that the Lord would make them *increase* (the positive side of coveting) and *overflow* (to be in excess) in *love for each other and for everyone else*. The purpose of that prayer was to see the Thessalonians be strengthened in their hearts and be *blameless* (unblemished) and *holy in the presence of God*. This would be noted when Jesus returns *with all his holy ones* (angels?).

If faith is strong and the future is secure, then any hardship can be endured. The race is not always to the swift. Often it is to the one who keeps on keeping on. ■

APPLICATION

IF YOU KNEW

BY DAVID FAUST

“The future ain’t what it used to be.” (Yogi Berra)

“It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further than you can see.” (Winston Churchill)

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On the day I was born, I didn’t realize where I was, who I was, or what was coming. Babies don’t know how their lives will unfold. Maybe that’s for the best.

When I was in first grade, I didn’t grasp what it would mean to spend the next 12 years in school or how many assignments lay ahead. When I was baptized at 9 years old, I couldn’t comprehend all the tests my faith would face in the years to come.

I graduated from high school 50 years ago (in 1972). Members of my graduating class couldn’t foresee all the twists and turns our lives would take. I didn’t realize that three years later I would be married. I could barely imagine what fatherhood and grandfatherhood would be like. When I was 18, the year 2022 seemed like a futuristic dream occupied by *The Jetsons* cartoon characters. What do you think the world will be like 50 years from now, in 2072?

Hard Times Ahead

Only God sees time whole. No matter how much we plan, prepare, and prognosticate, we have a limited ability to foresee the future. Maybe that’s for the best.

On their wedding day, does a couple fully understand what it means to pledge their love “for better or worse, for richer and poorer, in sickness and in health”? When parents welcome a new baby into their home, do they realize what that child will cost—not only in dollars, but in sleepless nights, hard conversations, and trips to the emergency room? When a company fills a job opening, who knows whether the new employee will

crash and burn within the first six months or stay and enjoy a productive 40-year career?

Each season of life contains hurts, joys, limitations, and regrets. If we knew how many difficulties the future holds, we might feel overwhelmed. Mercifully, God unrolls the timeline inch by inch, like a scroll. I’m glad everything doesn’t hit us all at once.

Better Things Ahead

There’s much we do not know . . . but God knows. That’s why it makes sense to live by faith, trusting the Lord more than we trust our own plans and abilities. Despite severe suffering and persecution (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2:14), the Thessalonian Christians persevered because of their “endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3). First Thessalonians shows that followers of Christ can expect to suffer, but it also highlights hope and mentions the Lord’s triumphant return near the end of each of the book’s five chapters.

If we knew all the troubles looming ahead, we would be disheartened. A wise adage says, “I don’t know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future.” The more we know the depth of God’s love, the easier it is to trust his plans. The more we know about the glories of Heaven, the better we can withstand the troubles of earth.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

Personal Challenge: Discuss these questions in your small group or with a trusted friend: *Am I a pessimist, an optimist, or a bit of both? What excites me about the future? What am I looking forward to—and what am I dreading?* ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICAH ODOR

1. Are you a pessimist, an optimist, or a bit of both?
2. What excites you about the future? What are you looking forward to—and what are you dreading?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:13** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words.

3. “Endurance” is a major theme in this passage. How do you see Paul demonstrating endurance?
 - How do you see the church in Thessalonica demonstrating endurance?
4. Paul explicitly talked about both trials and temptations in this passage. Look again at verses 3-5; what trials was the church facing? What temptations?
5. Look at the relationship demonstrated in verses 8-10. Do you feel this way about anyone else?
 - Do you know anyone who feels this way about you?
6. In verse 3, Paul told the Thessalonian church that they were “destined for” trials. Do you think this was a statement about that specific church or is it a universal statement about the Christian life? Why?
7. In what area of your life are you demonstrating endurance right now?
8. Where in your life are you “unsettled by these trials”?
 - What will you do to stand firm this week?
9. Imagine repeating Paul’s prayer in verses 11-13 about someone. Who could you pray this for? How would you tell them?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: “This week, I will . . .”

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Thessalonians 4:16—5:18**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■