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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.

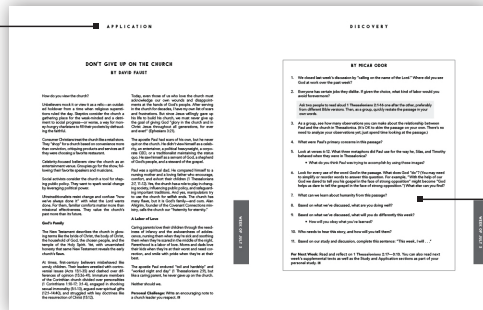
HOW TO USE

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



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

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



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

WEEK OF JULY 24, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Persevere so you may
be counted worthy.**

UNIT: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

THEME: Walk Worthy

LESSON TEXT: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4

BE STRONG THROUGH TRIALS

BY MARK SCOTT

Jesus' half-brother James gave inspired advice about how to be strong through trials. His advice was to have the right attitude of joy and to ask God in prayer for wisdom (James 1:2-5). Paul gave the Thessalonians additional inspired advice about how to be strong through trials. It had to do with growing in faith and love, recognizing God's judgment, and constantly praying.

We enter the second Epistle to the Thessalonians in this lesson. A poor understanding about the future evidently continued to plague the church. Some people in the church were confused about the nature of God's judgment (chapter 1), some were confused about how the evil forces leveled against the church would play out (chapter 2), and some were given to sloth—evidently wondering why work was even necessary since Jesus was returning (chapter 3). Their worthy walk in the Lord was being compromised by wrongheaded thinking.

Faith and Love Help Us Be Strong Through Trials

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Paul gave a typical salutation in the first two verses. (Still, this greeting was deeper, richer, and sweeter than the typical salutation of first-century letter writing, which usually consisted of "Greetings.") Paul's greeting was filled with theology (*grace and peace*) and two members of the trinity (*God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*).

Paul also gave a typical thanksgiving for the church (vv. 3-4). One thing is missing, though, from his typical triad of Christian virtues. He spoke of *faith* and *love* but not hope. Is that a clue to part of the Thessalonians' problems? Sometimes what is missing is as important as what is included (see William G. Doty's *Letters in Primitive Christianity*).

Paul thanked (the word for the English "eucharist") God for them. The reasons were simple and obvious. Their faith was *growing* (hyper-flourishing) and their love was *increasing* ("more than enough"; it is the normal word for "coveting"). Paul did not mind boasting (glorying or exulting) about their *perseverance* ("remaining strong under") and their faith during their *persecutions and trials*.

God's Judgment Helps Us Be Strong Through Trials

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

The heading sounds strange at first pass. God's wrath is a help? Yes! Knowing that right will be vindicated and wrong will be eradicated does bring comfort to God's

people. It helps them stay in the fight. *All this is evidence (proof) that God's judgment is right* (proper or fitting; cf. Romans 3:4). These believers who were standing up under great *suffering* would be *counted worthy* by God (mentioned twice in the text).

God's judgment (justness) is twofold: to reward believers and *pay back* unbelievers.

Believers will experience four things from this God of justice: (1) vindication from people who had troubled (pressed in) on them; (2) relief (rest) from their oppressors; (3) glorification with Jesus when he comes; and (4) sharing in the privilege of marveling at Jesus when he returns.

Unbelievers will also experience four things from this God of justice: (1) they will be paid back for mistreating Christians; (2) they will be punished (vindictive justice) for not knowing God or obeying the gospel; (3) they will experience *everlasting destruction* (unavoidable distress and torment. Some scholars would say that since the word means to annihilate and kill that they will cease to exist, known as annihilationism—but the church at large through the centuries has not clung to that doctrine, opting instead for eternal judgment.); and (4) they will experience being *shut out from the presence of the Lord*.

Jesus' return will be glorious. He will be revealed in *blazing fire* (penal retribution) *with his powerful angels*. He will be *glorified* in or with his people. He will be *marveled at among all those who have believed*. This glorious event can sustain the most discouraged believer.

Prayer Helps Us Be Strong Through Trials

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Two nuances of prayer are mentioned in these verses. The first is that Paul prayed for the Thessalonians *constantly*. This is known as the ministry of intercession. Paul prayed for them to be made worthy of God's calling on their lives. Paul also prayed that their desire to do good—and the good deeds that sprung from it—would produce fruit.

The second is that Paul prayed for the name of Jesus to be *glorified*. This means his weighty presence and shining brilliance would be made famous throughout the world. It means that his good news would run and have free course in the world. When prayer sets the mind on Heaven, any trial on earth can be endured. ■

APPLICATION

IT'S MESSY ON THE BOAT

BY DAVID FAUST

Image doesn't always match reality. Fast-food burgers look fresh and delicious on TV commercials, but often they turn out dry and disappointing at the local drive-through. Real estate ads show homes with beautifully decorated rooms and perfectly manicured lawns, but the families who live there know about the clutter and the weeds. With the help of makeup, lighting, editing, and photo filters, models look better in magazines than they do in real life.

Some read the biblical account of Noah's ark and treat it like a charming little children's story, but in fact it's a solemn reminder about God's judgment and his saving grace. Imagine what it was like being cooped up with all those animals for months. It was messy on the boat—crowded, smelly, dirty, and dangerous. But to be saved from the flood, that messy place was exactly where Noah and his family needed to be.

Unvarnished Reality

Sometimes we glamorize stories in the Bible instead of viewing them realistically. The characters we meet in Scripture come alive with fresh relevance when we remember they were real, unvarnished people like ourselves.

Abraham and Sarah serve as great role models of faith, but it wasn't glamorous when they had to move and make their home in an unfamiliar land. The patriarchs Isaac and Jacob spent a lot of time on mundane chores like finding water and pasture for their livestock. Joseph endured cruel mistreatment from his brothers before rising to a high position in Egyptian government. Moses met with God on the mountain, but he also felt the crushing burden of leadership and the sting of harsh criticism. Naomi and Ruth experienced the grief of widowhood. David's victories on the battlefield didn't prevent him from feeling the pain of his own moral failure and the sorrow of his infant son's death. Jonah endured three days in a fish's stinky belly and Daniel survived a terrifying night in a lions' den.

Jesus' disciples witnessed mighty miracles, but they also engaged in petty squabbles. John the Baptist questioned, Martha worried, Thomas doubted, James and John thundered, and Peter denied the Lord.

Don't Go Overboard

Church websites show smiling faces, sharp-looking graphics, and glowing reviews. At most churches, you will be greeted warmly when you arrive. But do the images match reality? Christian people aren't photoshopped models with perfect lives. We wrestle with the same struggles and temptations common to everyone else. Our bodies break down. Our jobs are stressful. Our marriages, families, and friendships are imperfect. Christians disagree about all sorts of issues, big and small.

The Thessalonian church faced intensifying hardship, but their faith and love kept increasing as well. The apostle Paul found their faithfulness so encouraging that he bragged about their "perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials" they endured (2 Thessalonians 1:4). Yet, this same church contained "idle and disruptive" members. They should have been a busy body, but instead they were "busybodies" (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

It's messy on the boat. Sometimes it's so messy we're tempted to go overboard and abandon the boat altogether, forgetting that it's deadly outside. Remember: Christ himself is our lifeboat. What saves us from the flood? His blood. What saves the human race? His grace. The church consists of imperfect people riding the waves together, trusting the Savior to get us through the storm. Don't give up the ship.

Personal Challenge: Someone has said, "The world at its worst needs the church at its best." How are you helping your church to be at its best? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICAH ODOR

1. Have you ever had to judge a contest, referee a sport, or sit on a jury? What was it like?
2. Do you tend to focus more on your successes or your failures?
 - Do you tend to focus on the success of others or their failures?
3. Last week, we talked about encouragement. Who did you encourage over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Thessalonians 1:1-12** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words.

4. Reread verses 3 and 4. If Paul were writing about you, what one thing in your spiritual life would he boast about?
5. We tend to think that being judged is a bad thing, but Paul wrote about a coming judgment in an encouraging way. Why would judgment be encouraging for the church in Thessalonica?
 - In what areas of life might a coming judgment be encouraging for you?
6. Verses 6-10 contain a significant warning that we shouldn't gloss over. What emotions do you feel as you read these words?
 - What do those verses make you want to do?
7. Verse 11 contains a beautiful prayer by Paul for his friends. If you knew Paul was praying that God would "bring to fruition your every desire for goodness," what good thing would you desire? What "deed prompted by faith?"
8. What can we learn about God from this week's passage?
9. What can we learn about ourselves?
10. With the warnings of verses 5-10 in mind, for whom do you need to be praying this week and how could you invite them to take a step closer to Jesus?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **2 Thessalonians 3:1-15**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖