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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.

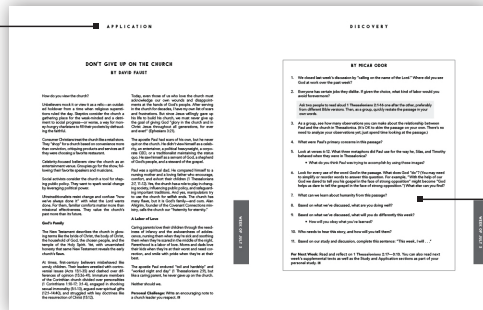
## HOW TO USE

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 31, 2022

**LESSON AIM:** **Never tire of doing  
what is right.**

**UNIT:** 1 & 2 Thessalonians

**THEME:** Walk Worthy

**LESSON TEXT:** 2 Thessalonians 3:1-15

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Proverbs 6:6-11; 31:10-31; 1 Timothy 5:13

## DON'T BE IDLE WASTING TIME

BY MARK SCOTT

Stephen Langton (1150–1228) was an English cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. Later he became the Archbishop of Canterbury. He is credited with dividing the Bible into chapters. His judgments concerning the divisions of thought often make sense. Other times, not so much.

The reader of 2 Thessalonians will have to decide whether a break makes sense when coming to chapter 3. *As for other matters* sounds like a new subject and therefore the chapter division. But the Greek Bible simply has “Finally” or “The remaining ones.” That might just as well connect back to the former paragraph of 2:13-17 where Paul encouraged the church to stand firm in their faith. Maybe instructions related to prayer and the Lord’s faithfulness fit with the former teachings best. But prayer can also keep us industrious. So, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 might well be a bridge from 2:13-17 to 3:6-15.

**Prayer Is a Good Use of Time**

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Prayer is always a good move. Paul made two prayer requests. He asked the Thessalonians to pray that the gospel (*message of the Lord*) would *spread rapidly* (run and have free course) and *be honored* (glorified). Since the gospel made a difference in the lives of the Thessalonians, he desired that it do the same work for others. Paul also asked God to deliver him and his team from *wicked and evil people who have no faith*.

These two prayer requests are undergirded by three strong statements about the Lord: (1) *The Lord is faithful*; (2) the Lord *will strengthen them and protect them from the devil*; and (3) the Lord will *direct* (to guard straight through) their *hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance*. Since eschatology was the main problem with the Thessalonian church, perhaps they would need to remember to pray, “Thy kingdom come.”

**Sloth Is a Lousy Use of Time**

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

It is hard to know exactly what tempted the believers in Thessalonica to be lazy. (Was it the view that since Christ was returning, work made no sense at all?) Regardless of the genesis of that thinking, Paul felt compelled to address it in a major way. His language was strong. The Thessalonians needed to learn from the ant (Proverbs 6:6-11) and the virtuous woman (Proverbs 31:10-31), and

they needed to avoid the path of some of the widows in Ephesus (1 Timothy 5:13).

Paul underlined his command about sloth *in the name of the Lord Jesus* (i.e., in his authority). The believers were to avoid a brother or sister who was *idle* (living disorderly or irregularly) and *disruptive* (mentioned twice in the text), and who did not *live according to the teaching* Paul gave them.

Paul added to that command in verses 11-15, but for the moment he bared his heart (and the hearts of his fellow church planters) and used his own life and ministry as a personal example. Paul wanted them to follow his *example* (mimic him). He and his missionary team did not presume on people. They were not idle during his short time in Thessalonica. They paid for whatever food they ate. They worked *night and day*. They labored and toiled in such a way so as not to be a *burden*. Paul admitted having certain *rights* (authority) as an apostle, but he did not want to overstep that privilege. Rather, he wanted to be a *model* (someone over which others could trace their lives).

Bottom line? “No work; no eat.” In the words of at least one Bible commentator, “Stop fussing; stop idling; stop sponging.”

Word had come to Paul (most likely through Timothy’s report—1 Thessalonians 3:6) that idle and disruptive people were just being *busybodies* (to bustle about). Paul again called on the authority of Jesus to urge them to *settle down* (be quiet) and *earn the food they eat*. If they would just not *tire of doing what is good* (Galatians 6:9-10), they would avoid the sin of sloth.

Lest someone think this sin is not as bad as something like immorality, Paul puts sloth into a church discipline offense. If someone is lazy, church fellowship is to be withdrawn. “*Do not associate with them*” could not be clearer. The goal, as always in the case of church discipline, was restoration. Any shame brought on this brother or sister was intended to bring about repentance. That is why Paul did not want the church to regard such a one as an *enemy* but as a *fellow believer* who is living in error.

Work (not workaholism) is a big deal. It was ordained in creation before the fall of humankind (Genesis 2:15). When Jesus comes again, the commended will be those who are working (Luke 12:38). ■

## SOMETHING IS OUT OF WHACK IN MY CHURCH

BY DAVID FAUST

What does it mean to say your back is “out of whack”? How can you tell if something is “in whack”?

*Whack* means to strike sharply like a hammer pounds a nail or an axe chops a tree. Imagine a drummer beating a cadence on a drum, and you can understand why “out of whack” means being out of rhythm or out of step.

According to another theory, the expression “out of whack” arose when frustrated owners had to strike finicky motors or appliances to get them to work—as in, “My lawn mower won’t start unless I whack it.” (*Wacky*, by the way, originally meant someone who had endured a hard blow to the head.) Something is out of whack when it’s not in top form or working the way it was designed to perform.

Let’s be honest. A lot of local churches don’t operate well. It’s beautiful when they do—when the body of Christ functions with harmony and efficiency. But it’s rare to find a congregation where everyone is “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and aligned around a common mission. Something is out of whack in the church.

### Busy Bees

Insects provide a positive example of industriousness and cooperation. “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!” (Proverbs 6:6).

A high-functioning colony of honeybees illustrates God’s marvelous design. Inside a beehive, some worker bees guard the hive while others build the comb, care for the queen, or collect and store nectar. Some of the workers provide natural air conditioning; they adjust the temperature of the honeycomb by fanning their wings. Others (called undertaker bees) remove dead bees from the beehive.

Why can’t God’s people be so well organized? Why are churches often so divided, disorganized, and ineffective?

### Sloppy Agape

Here’s an unpleasant thought: Maybe you and I are part of the problem. What kinds of problem people make the church out of whack?

**Activity Addicts.** Some church members are always on the go, but they have forgotten why. They volunteer a lot and seldom slow down, but a flurry of activity doesn’t guarantee spiritual maturity. Like Martha who “was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made” (Luke 10:40), activity addicts stay busy, but they miss the blessings of sitting quietly at Jesus’ feet.

**Love Laggards.** For some Christians, church revolves around their personal preferences. Love laggards practice sloppy agape. For them, love is something to receive, not to give. They stick around if the church meets their needs and they “get something out of it,” but they don’t put much into it—and they’re quick to go elsewhere if anything displeases them.

**Imperfect Perfectionists.** Hypercritical church members find fault with others and smugly assume, “Things would go better if they were done my way.” In an imperfect world, though, it’s hard to be a happy perfectionist, because we all have flaws. Imperfect perfectionists are never satisfied with others because deep down they are frustrated with themselves.

I hate to admit it, but sometimes I recognize symptoms of dysfunction like these in myself. What if one thing that’s “out of whack” in the church . . . is *me*? Can we learn to serve the Lord with humble, cheerful hearts, working hard while always remembering why? Let’s take a whack at it.

**Personal Challenge:** On a piece of paper, list things that bother you about the church you attend. Then pray about each item on the list. In your prayer: (a) ask the Lord to give you grace, patience, and humility toward other members of Christ’s family, and (b) ask the Lord what you personally can do to improve any areas of weakness in your church. ■

## DISCOVERY

### BY MICAH ODOR

1. Who among your family and friends is a good role model as a hard worker? What about their life is worth imitating?
2. When is it easiest for you to work hard? When is it the most difficult?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Thessalonians 3:1-15** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions.

What is this passage about? Summarize Paul's concerns and his instructions. What is he trying to address?

3. In verses 6 and 11, Paul warned not just against being "idle" but being "idle and disruptive." How is the idleness Paul warned against different from resting or being unable to work?
4. In verses 7-9, Paul talked about being "a model for you to imitate." What is one thing in your own life that is worth imitating?
  - What one thing would you like to imitate from others?
5. In verses 14 and 15, Paul talked about using shame as a tool for positive outcomes. How is Paul's instruction in verse 15 different from the way our society usually uses shame?
6. What can we learn about God from this week's passage?
7. What can we learn about ourselves?
8. Today's reading began with Paul's prayer that "the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored." Where do you see this happening in your circles?
  - How could you help the Good News spread?
9. What is one area in which you need to be especially diligent this week?
10. Based on our discussion and study, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1—3:3** as we begin a study of Ezekiel on sin and consequences. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **■**