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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.

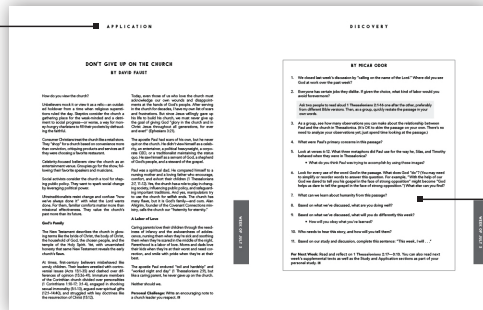
## HOW TO USE

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 3, 2022**

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

**UNIT:** 1 & 2 Thessalonians

**THEME:** Walk Worthy

**LESSON TEXT:** 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Matthew 10:38; Ephesians 4:1-2;  
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 1 Timothy 4:10

## LABOR PROMPTED BY LOVE

BY MARK SCOTT

Christianity is not for the lazy. This does not mean believers should ignore the sabbath principle. Nor does it mean life must be lived at some frantic pace that can actually destroy the work of the gospel in the soul. There is a need for *Making Room for Life* (a book by Randy Frazee). But “Christianity is not for the lazy” does mean the Christian experience can be described by the word *labor*. The apostle Paul did not labor to *achieve* salvation; he labored because he had salvation.

We might ask what motivated Paul’s labor in the Lord. In this lesson text, Paul explained how his message was pure, how his motives were noble, and how his ministry methods were unimpeachable. His loving ways stood in stark contrast to the practices of the traveling philosophers of his day (e.g., flattery, extortion, etc.).

**The Labor of Preaching**

1 Thessalonians 2:1-6

Paul reminded the Thessalonians of his initial *visit* to their city, a time when he (not surprisingly) preached the gospel to them (Acts 17:1-9). Paul had suffered and *been treated outrageously* (insulted and injured) in Philippi (Acts 16:19-40). But that did not stop his labor of preaching. His witness was bold even amid *strong opposition*. Paul’s *appeal* (encouragement) was free from *error* (deception), *impure motives* (uncleanness), or tricky methods (guile).

Paul’s preaching goal was to be *approved* (tested) by God and to *please* (to fit or be inclined toward) God. That is why Paul did not use *flattery* or greed (desire for more). Paul’s preaching was for an audience of One. He did not seek *praise from people*, even though he could have made some demands because of his status as an apostle.

**The Labor of Soul Care**

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

The pulpit can be an integrative point for the church, but it cannot accomplish everything. Labor prompted by love must also include taking care of people—something preaching alone cannot accomplish. Paul drew on *mother* and *father* metaphors to illustrate his labor of soul care for the Thessalonian church.

Any *nursing mother* knows the tenderness and long hours required to care for little ones. Paul used deeply affectionate language to describe how he conducted

himself toward the church. This tender love caused Paul to reveal his heart toward the people. Verse 8 is one of the more beautiful in this section, “*Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.*” Paul’s labor was always more than just being a depository of information.

Paul’s work ethic was evident in this soul care. He deeply desired not to be a burden. He was willing to go through *toil* (labor that made one sweat) and *hardship* (day-to-day labor). He was tireless in his efforts, working *night and day*. Paul could accept pay or reject pay for preaching the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:15-18), but he never wanted to burden people for his preaching. This same work ethic drove his behavior, which was *holy, righteous, and blameless*.

Mothers may be tender, but fathers often function more like coaches. Dads encourage (uplift or exhort), comfort (pacify), and urge (bear witness to) their children. Paul acted the same toward the church. Paul gave them the best of the metaphors—i.e., tenderness and encouragement.

**The Labor of Suffering**

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

Labor that is not prompted by love can degenerate into duty, obligation, and drudgery. In addition, it will not have the power to endure the tough times. Paul acknowledged that the gospel was the source of transformation. No *human word* could do the work in a believer that God’s Word could do.

When the Thessalonians ended up suffering for the gospel, they proved they were *imitators* (mimics) of other Christians (e.g., the ones who had suffered so much in the earliest days of the church in *Judea*—Acts 8:1-4). Paul was not being flippant about this. Suffering is serious. Neither was Paul being anti-Semitic. When he spoke of the Jews, he did not mean all Jews, but the Jewish aristocracy (leaders) who persecuted Jesus and his followers.

Sometimes God’s people suffer at the hands of the religious, not the irreligious. People *displease God* by causing such suffering. They *displease God* and are *hostile* to everyone. The reality, though, is they end up simply adding to their sin. God’s *wrath* is what awaits them. That is not a positive prospect. Whatever labor they are giving, it certainly is not motivated by love. ■

## DON'T GIVE UP ON THE CHURCH

BY DAVID FAUST

How do you view the church?

Unbelievers mock it or view it as a relic—an outdated holdover from a time when religious superstitions ruled the day. Skeptics consider the church a gathering place for the weak-minded and a detriment to social progress—or worse, a way for money-hungry charlatans to fill their pockets by defrauding the faithful.

Consumer Christians treat the church like a retail store. They “shop” for a church based on convenience more than conviction, critiquing products and services as if they were choosing a favorite restaurant.

Celebrity-focused believers view the church as an entertainment venue. Groupies go for the show, following their favorite speakers and musicians.

Social activists consider the church a tool for shaping public policy. They want to spark social change by leveraging political power.

Ultratraditionalists resist change and confuse “how we’ve always done it” with what the Lord wants done. For them, familiar comforts matter more than missional effectiveness. They value the church’s past more than its future.

### God’s Family

The New Testament describes the church in glowing terms like the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the household of God, the chosen people, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Yet, with unvarnished honesty that same New Testament reveals the early church’s flaws.

At times, first-century believers misbehaved like unruly children. Their leaders wrestled with controversial issues (Acts 15:1-35) and clashed over differences of opinion (15:36-41). Immature members of the Corinthian church divided over personalities (1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:1-4), engaged in shocking sexual immorality (5:1-13), argued over spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40), and struggled with key doctrines like the resurrection of Christ (15:12).

Today, even those of us who love the church must acknowledge our own wounds and disappointments at the hands of God’s people. After serving in the church for decades, I have my own list of scars and frustrations. But since Jesus willingly gave up his life to build his church, we must never give up the goal of giving God “glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!” (Ephesians 3:21).

The apostle Paul had scars of his own, but he never quit on the church. He didn’t view himself as a celebrity, an entertainer, a political heavyweight, a corporate CEO, or a traditionalist maintaining the status quo. He saw himself as a servant of God, a shepherd of God’s people, and a steward of the gospel.

Paul was a spiritual dad. He compared himself to a nursing mother and a loving father who encourage, comfort, and exhort their children (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11-12). Yes, the church has a role to play in changing society, influencing public policy, and safeguarding important traditions. And yes, manipulators try to use the church for selfish ends. The church has many flaws, but it is God’s family—and ours. Alan Ahlgrim, founder of the Covenant Connections ministry, calls the church our “fraternity for eternity.”

### A Labor of Love

Caring parents love their children through the neediness of infancy and the awkwardness of adolescence, nursing them when they’re sick and soothing them when they’re scared in the middle of the night. Parenthood is a labor of love. Moms and dads love their kids when they’re at their worst and need correction, and smile with pride when they’re at their best.

The apostle Paul endured “toil and hardship” and “worked night and day” (1 Thessalonians 2:9), but like a caring parent, he never gave up on the church.

Neither should we.

**Personal Challenge:** Write an encouraging note to a church leader you respect. ■

## DISCOVERY

### BY MICAH ODOR

1. We closed last week's discussion by "calling on the name of the Lord." Where did you see God at work over the past week?
2. Everyone has certain jobs they dislike. If given the choice, what kind of labor would you avoid forevermore?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Thessalonians 2:1-16** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, quickly restate the passage in your own words.

3. As a group, see how many observations you can make about the relationship between Paul and the church in Thessalonica. (It's OK to skim the passage on your own. There's no need to analyze your observations yet; just spend time looking at the passage.)
4. What were Paul's primary concerns in this passage?
5. Look at verses 6-12. What three metaphors did Paul use for the way he, Silas, and Timothy behaved when they were in Thessalonica?
  - What do you think Paul was trying to accomplish by using those images?
6. Look for every use of the word *God* in the passage. What does God "do"? (You may need to simplify or reorder words to answer this question. For example, "With the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition" might become "God helps us dare to tell the gospel in the face of strong opposition.") What else can you find?
7. What can we learn about humanity from this passage?
8. Based on what we've discussed, what are you doing well?
9. Based on what we've discussed, what will you do differently this week?
  - How will you obey what you've learned?
10. Who needs to hear this story, and how will you tell them?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:13**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■