Contents

1 The Gospel Comes to Thessalonica—June 30–July 6 ......................................................... 5
2 Preserving Relationships—July 7–13 .................................................................................. 17
3 Thessalonica in Paul’s Day—July 14–20 ........................................................................... 29
4 Joyous and Thankful (1 Thess. 1:1–10)—July 21–27 ......................................................... 41
5 The Apostolic Example (1 Thess. 2:1–12)—July 28–August 3 ............................................. 53
6 Friends Forever (1 Thess. 2:13–3:13)—August 4–10 ......................................................... 65
7 Living Holy Lives (1 Thess. 4:1–12)—August 11–17 .......................................................... 77
8 The Dead in Christ (1 Thess. 4:13–18)—August 18–24 ..................................................... 89
9 Final Events (1 Thess. 5:1–11)—August 25–31 .................................................................. 101
10 Church Life (1 Thess. 5:12–28)—September 1–7 ............................................................... 113
11 Promise to the Persecuted (2 Thess. 1:1–12)—September 8–14 ....................................... 125
12 The Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:1–12)—September 15–21 ....................................................... 137
13 Keeping the Church Faithful (2 Thess. 2:13–3:18)—September 22–28 ......................... 149

Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
Come visit us at our Web site at [http://www.absg.adventist.org]

Principal Contributor
Jon Paulien

Associate Editor
Soraya Homayouni

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Wendy Marcum

Publication Manager
Lea Alexander Greve

Art Director and Illustrator
Lars Justinen

Editorial Assistant
Sharon Thomas-Crews

Concept Design
Dever Designs

The teachers edition components were written by the following:
The Lesson in Brief and Learning Cycle, Lessons 1–13: Carl P. Cosaert, assistant professor of New Testament and Early Christianity, School of Theology, Walla Walla University, College Place, Washington, U.S.A.

The Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
n the 1940s, Nobel Prize-winning Irish author Samuel Beckett wrote a drama called *Waiting for Godot*, about two hapless, homeless men waiting on the side of the road for someone named Godot, who was supposed to come and save them from the meaningless and pathetic absurdity of life.

“His name is Godot?” Estragon asks.

“I think so,” Vladimir answers.

As Vladimir and Estragon stand, suckled by the dehydrated hope that Godot will come, a procession of human suffering, missteps, goose steps, limps, and hobbles stomps past them. Bored, not so much by all the pain of life but by its uselessness, they seek diversion in doing good, such as lifting a blind man who has stumbled.

“Come, let us get to work!” Vladimir says. “In an instant all will vanish, and we’ll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!” But as Vladimir reaches, he falls and can’t get up.

Despite more promises that Godot will come, life seems so miserable in the meantime that they decide to hang themselves. But having no rope, Estragon takes off the cord that holds up his pants, which collapse around his ankles. Testing the cord’s strength, the two men pull; it breaks, and they almost fall. They decide to find a better rope and try again later.

“We’ll hang ourselves tomorrow,” Vladimir says. “Unless Godot comes.”

“And if he comes?” Estragon asks.
“We’ll be saved.”

This mysterious Godot never comes, which means they’re not saved. They weren’t, of course, supposed to be. Beckett’s whole point with the drama is to show the absurdity and hopelessness of life.

What a contrast to the view of life presented in the Bible. In particular, what a contrast to the view presented in this quarter’s lessons, that deals with the apostle Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians.

Like Beckett’s two characters, the Thessalonians faced stresses, strains, struggles, even outright persecution. In other words, life for them, as for all of us, has its hard moments. How easy and understandable it would have been for them to fall into the futility, nihilism, and pessimism that Beckett expressed in his drama. Instead, the Thessalonians had a sure hope, a hope based on what Christ had done for them, a hope that pointed to the greatest promise of all—the Second Coming (which Beckett was mocking, as well). Though Paul had chided the Thessalonians, as they had behavioral, as well as theological issues in the church (sound familiar?), it was to them, and to us, that Paul wrote some of the most incredible, uplifting, and hopeful words in all inspiration.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16–18).

It doesn’t get any more hopeful or glorious than that, does it?

This quarter, through Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, we’ll get a glimpse into the life of an early Christian church—an urban church, really—and see some of the struggles and challenges that it faced, including the difficulties that arose from the fact that Christ had not yet returned. Fascinating, too, is that however different their circumstances from our own, so often the principles reflected in Paul’s words to the Thessalonians deal with the issues and challenges that we, too, confront as we await, not some mysterious Godot but the Lord Jesus, whose death on the cross at the first coming guarantees His return in glory at the Second.

Jon Paulien is dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, California.
How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
Lesson 1

*June 30–July 6

(page 6 of Standard Edition)

The Gospel Comes to Thessalonica

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Acts 16:9–40; 17:1–4, 12; Jer. 23:1–6; Isa. 9:1–7; Isaiah 53; Rom. 1:16.

Memory Text: “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13, NIV).

Key Thought: Our assurance of God’s promises must be based on our confidence in His Holy Scriptures.

The young pastor sat outside with a young woman who had just been baptized. Much to his surprise, she said, “I need to be baptized again.”

When the pastor asked why, she responded, “There are things that I didn’t tell the senior pastor about my past.”

Thus began a long conversation about forgiveness in Christ, which she hungrily consumed. When the pastor finished praying with her, a huge downpour suddenly drenched them both. Eyes shining, the young woman said, “I’m being baptized again!”

A gracious God often provides living tokens, such as this unexpected rain, to assure believers that they are right with Him. But our confidence in God will be even more solidly grounded when it is based on the clear teaching of His Word. In this lesson we’ll see that the fulfillment of prophecy provided solid assurance to the new believers in Thessalonica.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 7.
The Preachers Pay a Price

**Read** Acts 16:9–40. According to the passage, why did the Philippians react so negatively to the gospel? What important principle can we find in their reaction that we always need to be wary of ourselves? In what other ways can this principle be made manifest, even in the lives of professed Christians?

The gospel is the good news of God’s mighty actions in Christ that lead to forgiveness, acceptance, and transformation (Rom. 1:16, 17). Through sin, the whole world was condemned; through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the whole world was given a new opportunity to have the eternal life that God originally wanted for all humanity. God’s mighty work was done for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). This work of redemption was accomplished outside of us, by Jesus, and we can add nothing to it—nothing. Yet, the gospel becomes real in our lives only when we accept, not only its condemnation of our sins but God’s forgiveness of those sins through Jesus.

Being that the gospel is such good news and is free, why would anyone resist or fight against it? The answer is simple: accepting the gospel calls us to set aside confidence in self and in worldly things such as money, power, and sexual attractiveness. Money, sex, and power are good things when submitted to the will and ways of God. But when people cling to these trivial matters that substitute for the assurance of the gospel, the gospel and those who proclaim it become a threat.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1, 2. Paul and Silas entered Thessalonica in pain, their bodies bearing the cuts and bruises they had received from their heavy beating and confinement in Philippi (Acts 16:22–24). But tokens of the mighty power of God (Acts 16:26, 30, 36) had encouraged their hearts. They boldly entered the synagogue at Thessalonica, in spite of their pain, and spoke again of the Messiah, who had changed their lives and sent them on a mission to preach the good news in places where it had not been heard before.

**What are the things of the world that, if we’re not careful, can draw us away from the Lord? Why, then, is it so important to keep the Cross and its meaning always at the center of our thoughts, especially when the lure of the world seems the strongest?**
Paul’s Preaching Strategy

What does Acts 17:1–3 tell us about the where, the when, and the how of Paul’s preaching strategy in Thessalonica?

Although 1 Thessalonians was among Paul’s earliest letters, both his theology and missionary strategy were well developed by the time he arrived in Thessalonica.

The first step in Paul’s missionary strategy was to attend the local synagogue on the Sabbath. This was natural because the Sabbath was a good time to reach Jews in large numbers. However, more than just a missionary strategy was at work here. Paul would have taken time for prayer and worship on the Sabbath even if no Jews or no synagogue was available (see Acts 16:13).

It was not uncommon in those days for Jews to invite synagogue visitors to speak, especially if they had lived in Jerusalem, as Paul and Silas had. The congregation would have been eager to hear news of Jewish life in other places. They also would have been interested in any new ideas the visitors had discovered from their study of the Scriptures. So, Paul’s strategy was a natural fit with the synagogue environment.

The second step in Paul’s strategy was to preach directly from their common Scriptures, the Old Testament. He also began with a topic of great interest to the Jews of the time, the Messiah (“the Christ” is the Greek equivalent of “the Messiah” in the Hebrew; see Acts 17:3). Using texts from the Old Testament, Paul demonstrated that the Messiah would first have to suffer before He would obtain the glory with which the Jews were familiar. In other words, the popular, glorious version of the Messiah’s mission was only part of the picture. When the Messiah would first appear, He would be a suffering servant rather than a royal conqueror.

Third, having established a fresh picture of the Messiah in their minds, Paul went on to tell the story of Jesus. He explained how Jesus’ life conformed to the pattern of the Bible prophecy that he had just shared with them. No doubt he added stories about his own previous doubts and opposition and also spoke of the convincing power of his personal encounter with the exalted Christ. According to Luke (Luke 24:25–27, 44–46), Paul’s preaching strategy in Thessalonica followed the same pattern that Jesus had used with His disciples after the resurrection.

Notice that Paul sought to reach people where they were, using that with which they were familiar. Why is this strategy so important? Think about those whom you want to reach. How can you learn to start where they are and not where you are?
Two Views of the Messiah

Since ancient times, readers of the Old Testament have noticed a variety of perspectives in the prophecies pointing toward the Messiah. Most Jews and early Christians identified two major strands in the Messianic prophecies. On the one hand, there were texts that pointed toward a royal Messiah: a conquering king who would bring justice to the people and extend Israel’s rule to the ends of the earth. On the other hand, there were texts that suggested the Messiah would be a Suffering Servant, humiliated and rejected. The mistake that many made was in not understanding that all these texts were referring to the same person—to different aspects of His work at different times.

Read Jeremiah 23:1–6, Isaiah 9:1–7, 53:1–6, Zechariah 9:9. List the characteristics of the future deliverer that you find in these texts. What kind of “conflicting” images appear here?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

These texts were puzzling in advance of the Messiah’s coming. On the one hand, the royal messianic texts usually contained no hint of suffering or humiliation. On the other hand, the Suffering Servant texts usually described the Messiah as having little power or worldly authority. One way that the Jews of Jesus’ day resolved this problem was to see the Suffering Servant as a symbol of the whole nation and its sufferings in the course of exile and occupation. By removing these texts from the messianic equation, many Jews expected the royal or conquering Messiah. This King, like David, would throw off the occupiers and restore Israel’s place among the nations.

Of course, a major problem that results from removing the Suffering Servant texts from the equation is that there are, indeed, significant Old Testament texts that blend the two major characteristics of the Messiah. They describe the same person. What is less clear, at first glance, is whether those characteristics occur at the same time or one after the other.

As shown in Acts 17:2, 3, Paul walked the Jews of Thessalonica through these Messianic Old Testament texts, and they together explored their significance.

In ancient times, the Jews were confused about the first coming of the Messiah. Today, we find much confusion about the Second Coming as well. What should this tell us about the importance of truly seeking to understand Bible truth? Why can false doctrine be so problematic?
Suffering Before Glory

Jesus, like Paul, studied the Old Testament and drew the conclusion that the Messiah would “have to suffer these things and then enter his glory” (Luke 24:26, NIV). The “have to” of Luke 24:26 translates the same word as Acts 17:3 (NIV), where Paul says the Messiah “had to suffer.” For Jesus and Paul, the priority of suffering before glory was written into the prophecies long before they were to have occurred. The question is, then, on what Old Testament basis did they come to this conclusion?

They likely would have noticed that the most significant figures in the Old Testament had a prolonged period of suffering before they entered into the glory period of their lives. Joseph spent some thirteen years in prison before ascending to the role of prime minister of Egypt. Moses spent 40 years chasing sheep through the desert before taking up his role as the powerful leader of the Exodus. David spent many years as a fugitive, some of that time in foreign lands, before being elevated to kingship. Daniel was a prisoner of war, and was even condemned to death, before his elevation to the position of prime minister of Babylon. In the Old Testament stories of these servants of God, there are foreshadowings of the Messiah, who would also suffer and be humiliated before being elevated to His full royal role.

The capstone of this New Testament conviction is found in the most widely quoted Old Testament text in the New Testament: Isaiah 53. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah was despised, rejected, and sorrowful (Isa. 53:2–4). Like a sanctuary lamb, He was slaughtered on account of our sins (Isa. 53:5–7), according to the will of the Lord (Isa. 53:8–10). But “after the suffering of his soul” (Isa. 53:11, NIV), He would justify many and receive a powerful inheritance (Isa. 53:12).

For the writers of the New Testament, Isaiah 53 was the key to the Messiah’s role. Paul would certainly have preached this text in Thessalonica. According to Isaiah 53, the Messiah would not appear kingly or powerful at the time of His first appearance. In fact, He would be rejected by many of His own people. But that rejection would be the prelude to the glorious Messiah of Jewish expectation. With this in mind, Paul was able to show that the Jesus he had come to know was, in fact, the Messiah whom the Old Testament had foretold.

Prayerfully read through Isaiah 53, realizing that it’s talking about what the Lord, our Creator, went through just so that you, personally, can have eternal life. In light of what this amazing truth tells us about the character of God, why should Christ be first and foremost in our lives?
A Church Is Born

According to Acts 17:1–4, 12, what classes of people made up the core of the Thessalonian church plant?

A part of Paul’s missionary strategy was “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (*Rom. 1:16, ESV*). During Paul’s ministry, the Jews regularly received the first opportunity to hear and accept the gospel. And the fact is that, according to the Bible, many Jews in Paul’s time did accept Jesus as the Messiah. Later, as the church started to apostatize and reject the law, especially the Sabbath, it became harder and harder for Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah because, after all, what Messiah would nullify the law, especially the Sabbath?

As the texts show, some of the Jews in Thessalonica were persuaded by Paul’s exposition of messianic texts in relation to the story of Jesus. One of these, Aristarchus, was later a coworker with Paul and even, at one point, a fellow prisoner (*see Col. 4:10, 11; Acts 20:4*). Another, Jason, was apparently wealthy enough to house the church at his home after they were no longer welcome in the synagogue, and he also provided at least a portion of the bond needed to prevent Paul’s arrest (*see Acts 17:4–9*).

The “God-fearing Greeks” (*Acts 17:4, NIV*) are usually thought to be Gentiles who became enamored with Judaism and attended the synagogue but did not convert. This was a widespread phenomenon in Paul’s day. These Gentiles became a natural bridge for Paul to reach those Gentiles who had no knowledge at all of Judaism or the Old Testament.

The Jewish, and relatively wealthy, character of the original church plant in Thessalonica is emphasized in Acts 17 (for example, verse 12), in which “prominent” Greeks also became believers. It is clear, however, that by the time 1 Thessalonians was written, the church to which Paul was writing was largely made up of Gentiles (*1 Thess. 1:9*) from the laboring classes (*1 Thess. 4:11*).

What we can see here is the universal character of the gospel—that it is for all people, all classes, all races; rich or poor, Greek or Jew, it doesn’t matter—Christ’s death was for the whole world. That is why our message, as Seventh-day Adventists, is for the whole world (*Rev. 14:6*)—without any exceptions. How important it is that we keep that mandate always before us. How important it is that we not become insular, self-absorbed, and more interested in sustaining what we have than in reaching out beyond the comfortable boundaries that we, perhaps even subconsciously, have set for ourselves.
Further Study: “From Paul’s day to the present time, God by His Holy Spirit has been calling after the Jew as well as the Gentile. ‘There is no respect of persons with God,’ declared Paul. The apostle regarded himself as ‘debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians,’ as well as to the Jews; but he never lost sight of the decided advantages possessed by the Jews over others, ‘chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.’ ‘The gospel,’ he declared, ‘is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.’” —Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 380.

“In preaching to the Thessalonians, Paul appealed to the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. . . . By the inspired testimony of Moses and the prophets he clearly proved the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah and showed that from the days of Adam it was the voice of Christ which had been speaking through patriarchs and prophets.”—Pages 221, 222. (See the extensive collection of Old Testament texts that follows on pages 222–229.)

“In the closing proclamation of the gospel, when special work is to be done for classes of people hitherto neglected, God expects His messengers to take particular interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth. . . . As they see the Christ of the gospel dispensation portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perceive how clearly the New Testament explains the Old, their slumbering faculties will be aroused, and they will recognize Christ as the Saviour of the world. Many will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer.”—Page 381.

Discussion Questions:

1 Paul approached the Jews of his day on the basis of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. To what degree is such an approach useful today with Jews, especially with secular Jews who might not even be familiar with the Old Testament prophecies? What other kinds of approaches should be considered today for secular Jews, as well as for any groups of unreached people?

2 How can the prophecies of the Bible be made to connect more effectively with your friends and neighbors? What approaches should you use with people who don’t believe in the authority of the Bible? For instance, how could Daniel 2 help someone from a secular or nonbiblical perspective start to trust the Bible as the Word of God?

Summary: A number of important points have been made in this opening week. What we should come away with, more than anything else, is just how important the Word of God is to our lives, our mission, and our witness. We need to be grounded in the Bible and the truths that it teaches, not only for ourselves but in order to be the most effective witnesses possible.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Acts 17:1–4

**The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that Christ’s suffering and death were a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Feel: Assured that his or her faith is not misplaced but is rooted in God’s ultimate plan to save the world.

Do: Share with others the certainty of his or her faith.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Slain From the Foundation of the World

A Jesus is described in Revelation 13:8 as the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (NKJV). What does this indicate about the nature and origin of God’s plan to redeem the world?

B Why was it necessary for Christ to suffer and die in order for the world to be restored? Why could God not simply have overlooked Adam’s and Eve’s sin?

C The apostle Paul refers to Christ as “our Passover lamb” (1 Cor. 5:7, NIV). How is the Passover lamb a type of Christ?

II. Feel: Saved by Another

A If you had been the oldest son in a Jewish family in Egypt during the Passover, what kind of emotions do you think you would have experienced following the event?

III. Do: Compelled to Share

A How has your gratitude for God’s free gift of salvation compelled you to live your life for Him?

**Summary:** Christ’s suffering and death was ultimately not a miscarriage of justice but the fulfillment of God’s plan to redeem the world. This realization can give us confidence in God’s Word and His love for us as it did for the new believers in Thessalonica.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Christ’s suffering and death was not ultimately a miscarriage of justice but part of God’s divine plan to deal with sin and restore sinners into unbroken fellowship with Him.

**Just for Teachers:** This week we explore why Scripture says it was “necessary” for the Messiah to suffer and die in order to fulfill God’s plan to redeem the world.

On August 5, 2010, disaster struck a precious-metals mine in Chile when 700,000 tons of rock collapsed into the mine’s main shaft, trapping 33 miners more than a half mile below ground. Rescue teams had nearly given up hope of finding the men alive, but finally, after 17 days of drilling small holes into different areas of the mine, one drill came back to the surface with a note attached to it: “The 33 of us in the shelter are well.” Miraculously the miners had survived, though they had nearly starved to death. Plans were immediately set in place to drill an escape tunnel.

Although many were frustrated that the escape tunnel took more than two months to drill, others were concerned that the size of the tunnel, which stretched for more than two thousand two hundred feet through solid rock, was too small.

Why did the tunnel have to be so small? While the engineers had detailed explanations, the simple answer was that it was “necessary” in order for the rescue to be successful. A larger escape tunnel (in an overexploited mine that was more than a century old) was just far too dangerous.

**Consider This:** The plight of the Chilean miners parallels our need of divine rescue. How much of the details about the “necessity” of God’s rescue plan do we need to understand?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. The Necessity of Christ’s Suffering and Death (*Review Acts 17:1–4 with the class.*)

According to Luke, a central component of Paul’s gospel presentation to
the Thessalonians was the fact that Christ’s suffering and death was not a tragic mistake but a divine “necessity.” The Greek word translated as “necessary” (dei) is a significant word for Luke. It occurs 18 times in his gospel and 22 more times in Acts. Luke uses this word to indicate that the events in Jesus’ life were not merely the result of chance but were part of a divine plan revealed in Scripture to redeem the human race.

The first time that Luke uses this word in his gospel occurs when Joseph and Mary lose sight of the 12-year-old Jesus in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41–51). When they find Him at last in the temple, Jesus says it should have been no surprise that He was there because it was “necessary” for Him to be “in His Father’s house.” This same basic message occurs multiple times in Luke as Jesus talks about various aspects of His life. Jesus speaks about the divine necessity of His preaching the gospel (Luke 4:43), of His healing of a crippled woman on the Sabbath (13:16), of His meal at the house of Zacchaeus, and, most important and most frequent, the necessity of His suffering, rejection, and ultimate death in Jerusalem (13:33; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26).

While it is easy to see the “necessity” behind some of these events, such as the healing of someone in order to demonstrate God’s love, why was it “necessary” that Jesus also suffer and die as part of God’s plan to save the world? Couldn’t God just have overlooked sin or given us a second chance that didn’t demand His death?

Although overlooking a sin might sound like an easy thing to do, God could not do it without compromising His justice and holiness. Sin is no trivial problem. It is entirely opposite of God’s character. Sin is evil; it causes suffering and brings death. To dismiss sin would have been the equivalent of justifying its existence. That is something God could not do. His very nature required that He deal with sin. Yet, as a loving God, He also wanted to offer mercy to sinners.

In order to be both just in dealing with sin and to be merciful in dealing with sinners, God chose to take the punishment and penalty of our sins upon Himself. He did this by sending Jesus to be our Substitute. Jesus died the death that we deserve so that we might have the life that He deserved. This is the very thing the apostle Paul explains in Romans 3:26, where he says that Jesus’ death made it possible for God to be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (NKJV).

**Consider This:** The Bible repeatedly describes God as being both a just God in dealing with sin and a loving God in dealing with sinners. What distorted pictures would emerge if we overemphasized, or only emphasized, one of these attributes?
II. The “Foolishness” of the Cross (Review Roman 1:16 with the class.)

While early Christians saw Christ’s suffering and death as a “necessary” part of God’s plan to redeem the world, Jews and Gentiles did not. The idea that the long-awaited Messiah was supposed to be crucified seemed ludicrous to Jews. The Messiah was supposed to defeat Israel’s enemies—not be crucified by them. The Romans also thought that Christians were deluded in their following of Jesus. Who would worship someone who was, at least in the mind of a Roman, a crucified criminal? From the world’s perspective, the Cross was an object of shame and defeat, not something to be venerated.

In a piece of ancient graffiti discovered in Rome that dates back to about the time of Paul, we can get a glimpse of the type of razzing and contempt that Christians must have experienced as a result of their faith. Interestingly enough, this discovery, which is known as the *Alexamenos graffito*, also appears to be the earliest known drawing of the crucifixion of Jesus. It depicts a crucifixion scene where the individual on the cross has the head of a donkey but the body of a man. Beside the cross a young man can be seen kneeling in worship. Scratched below the cross is the statement: “Alexander worships [his] god.” The point is obvious—Christians were seen as stupid for believing in Jesus. In this type of environment, it is no wonder that when writing to the Romans Paul had to remind them that the gospel of the crucified and raised Jesus was not something to be “ashamed” of but something to boast in (Rom. 1:16). For it is through the “foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:18) of the Cross that Christ conquered the power of sin and death.

**Consider This:** The message of the cross of Jesus continues to be ridiculed by unbelievers today. What can we do to encourage those within the church to not become “ashamed” of the Cross but to glory in it?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Encourage your students to use these questions as a way to think about the necessity of Christ’s death from a biblical perspective.

**Thought Questions:**

1. After the Resurrection, Luke tells of how Jesus rebuked two disciples on the road to Emmaus for failing to recognize that the Old Testament Scriptures indicated that it was “necessary” for the Messiah to suffer and be rejected. What events and/or stories do you see in the Old Testament that point toward the “necessity” of Jesus’ death?
What stories and events in Scripture might have looked, at one point in time, like failures or miscarriages of justice had the endings of the whole stories not already been known? How can this encourage us in our Christian walk today?

Application Questions:

1. Why, in your opinion, does the message of the Cross continue to be a stumbling block for humans today?

The reality of suffering in the world is one of the most difficult issues that prevents people from believing in the existence of an all-powerful and an all-loving God. While there are certainly no easy or quick answers to the problem of suffering, what comfort and hope can we find in the necessity of Christ’s suffering in our behalf?

3. The fact that Paul had to encourage the Christians in Rome not to be “ashamed” of the gospel (Rom. 1:16) indicates that Christians were facing public ridicule for their beliefs. In what ways are Christians ridiculed in society today?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Many people never really think about how necessary it was for Jesus to come as our Substitute. Use the following activity to help class members to reflect on this issue by first considering their own circumstances.

Activity: Ask class members to reflect on events in their lives when it was necessary that someone come to their assistance. What would have happened without this help? How did they express their gratitude in return? After sharing several stories, direct the conversation back to the lesson by asking what would have happened had God not done what was “necessary” for us? How should we be expressing our thankfulness to Him in return?
Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Acts 17:5–9, 10–15, 16–34; 1 Cor. 1:18–2:2; 1 Thess. 2:17–3:10.

Memory Text: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20, NKJV).

Key Thought: True evangelism leads to relationships that can stand the test of time and last for eternity.

Paul held a three-week series of evangelistic meetings in Thessalonica. It was a very exciting series, but it incited opposition from local religious leaders and from a gang of thugs. Paul was finally expelled by the city council, which also sought to prevent his return.

This lesson covers the aftermath of Paul’s attempt to evangelize Thessalonica. It would have been easy after such an experience for Paul to focus on the opposition and on other obstacles along the way. Instead, Paul’s mind was focused primarily on the relationships that he had developed with members of the new Christian community in Thessalonica.

Paul was heartbroken that he wasn’t able to spend more time with the believers. He knew that the short time he had been with them would leave them vulnerable to discouragement and negative influences. Not being able to be there in person, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write letters to them instead. Those letters make up the books in the New Testament known as “Thessalonians.”

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 14.
Opposition in Thessalonica

Read Acts 17:5–9. According to this passage, what was the primary motivation for the opposition to Paul’s message? What statements did his opponents make to get the city authorities interested in the case? How did those authorities respond?

When someone preaches new teachings and people get excited, the leaders and teachers of other religious groups may become jealous. Attention that was once placed upon them is now directed to others. As a result, they may behave in irrational ways in order to try to reduce the influence of the new teacher.

According to the Roman historian Suetonius, shortly before the events described in Acts 17, conflict arose among the Jews of Rome over a man Suetonius calls “Chrestus.” This term probably reflects a Roman misunderstanding of the Jewish concept of the Messiah or, in Greek, “the Christ.” Apparently someone’s preaching of the gospel had just split the Jewish community of Rome.

To Roman officials, debate over the Messiah sounded like preparation for the installation of a new king on the throne of Rome (see Acts 17:7). Probably for that reason the emperor expelled all Jews from his capital city (Acts 18:2). Some of these exiles settled in or passed through Thessalonica, bringing knowledge of these events to the city. Because the gospel had turned the world of Rome’s Jews upside down, religious leaders in Thessalonica were determined to prevent something similar from happening there.

Thessalonica itself was ruled by a city council of perhaps five or six “mayors” who made decisions as a group. This arrangement allowed for a considerable amount of independence from Rome, which they would be loath to give up. So, the behavior of the city officials in this matter was quite impressive under the circumstances. The similarity to recent events in Rome could have led to severe physical punishment for the new Christians. Instead, the city leaders responded even-handedly (contrast Acts 16:22–40). They took a significant amount of money from the new Christians as security so that they would not be the cause of further disturbances. Then the leaders let everyone go.

Jealousy and envy can destroy us. What can we learn from the life and teachings of Jesus that can help us to gain victory over these deadly sentiments?
The Episode in Berea

Persecution can be a two-way street. It is often provoked by malicious slander against those who have done nothing wrong. But it can also be provoked by inappropriate actions on the part of believers (1 Pet. 3:13–16, 4:12–16). It is very likely that the disturbance in Thessalonica was prompted not only by the jealousy of Paul’s opponents but also by the inappropriate actions of the new believers. The two letters to the Thessalonians reveal that Paul had major concerns about the lack of appropriate public behavior by some in the church.

Paul urges the Thessalonian Christians to live quiet lives and behave properly among their Gentile neighbors (1 Thess. 4:11, 12). He admonishes the unruly among them (1 Thess. 5:14). He commands them to avoid those in the community who are disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6, 7). And he notes that some members of the church are not only disorderly and idle but have become “busybodies” (2 Thess. 3:11). Thus, some members were not only troublesome to the church but also to the wider society. The persecution in Thessalonica was malicious, but there was blameworthy behavior among some new Christians, as well.

How was Paul’s experience in Berea different from that in Thessalonica? See Acts 17:10–15. What’s the message for us in that difference?

The Bereans were eager to know more about God and to better understand their Bibles. But while they listened with much openness, they also tested everything they heard from the apostles on the basis of what they found in their own study of the Old Testament.

This is an example for us. We can be open to new ideas, but we must always test these ideas on the basis of the teachings of the Bible. We have many things to learn and many to unlearn. At the same time, we must be careful to avoid error, as it will lead us away from truth.

While troublemakers from Thessalonica soon inserted themselves into the Berean situation, the Jews there did not close their minds to the new message; indeed, “many of the Jews believed” (vs. 12). While it was thought expedient for Paul to move on to Athens, Silas and Timothy were allowed to remain in Berea in order to encourage and strengthen the new believers.

What are some examples of the Christian church acting in ways that were clearly in the wrong? What lessons can we learn from those mistakes? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.
Interlude in Athens

According to Acts 17:14–16, Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea while Paul was escorted to Athens. Paul instructed his escorts to have Silas and Timothy join him in Athens, but there is no mention of their doing so. On the other hand, in 1 Thessalonians 3:1, 2, we learn that Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica from Athens. So, Timothy, at least, seems to have joined him there for a short time.

When speaking to Jews in Acts 17:2, 3, Paul begins with the theme of the Messiah in the Old Testament. When speaking to the pagan philosophers of Athens (Acts 17:16–34), where does he begin? What can we learn from these different approaches?

Paul does not simply enter Athens, march up to the Areopagus (known also as Mars’ Hill), and engage the philosophers there. He begins by spending some time walking around and making his own observations. He also engages the Jews of Athens and some of the Greeks in the synagogue there. Besides evangelizing to them in his customary way (see Acts 17:2, 3), he also would have been learning about the dominant culture in the city. The first step in any missionary effort is to listen and learn about the faith and worldviews of the people you are trying to reach.

Paul also spent time in the marketplace of Athens (which was below and within sight of the Areopagus, or Mars’ Hill), reasoning with anyone willing to talk with him. In the process he provoked the curiosity of some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who invited him to address them in the traditional place for such discussions.

He began his address to the intellectuals of Athens with observations about their city and religions. His theological beginning point was Creation, a topic in which both he and they were interested. In contrast with his approach in the synagogue, he did not argue his case from Scripture but from writings with which they would have been familiar (Acts 17:27, 28 both echo and quote Greek writers). But when he stepped into territory that went beyond the boundaries of topics where they were intellectually comfortable, the philosophers seemed to have abruptly ended the discussion. A few individuals, however, continued to talk with Paul and became believers.

How well do we understand the worldviews and religious beliefs of those around us? Why is it important for us to have at least some knowledge of these things as we seek to witness?
Arrival in Corinth

Acts 18:1–18 contains two major intersections with secular history. The first is the expulsion of the Jews from Rome during the reign of Claudius (Acts 18:2). Information from extrabiblical sources locates this event in A.D. 49. The other major intersection is the mention of the proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:12). Because proconsuls in Corinth were appointed for one-year terms, information from inscriptions and other data accurately dates Gallio’s term of office to A.D. 50–51. Critical scholars often doubt the historicity of the book of Acts, but there are many casual references such as these that confirm its portrayal of history.

Timothy must have traveled from Thessalonica to Berea with Paul and Silas (Acts 17:10, 14, 15) after their expulsion from Thessalonica. He then briefly joined Paul in Athens and was sent from there to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1, 2). There he joined up with Silas (Acts 18:5) and eventually journeyed to meet Paul in Corinth. First Thessalonians must have been written from Corinth shortly after Timothy’s arrival. Paul knew what people were thinking in Achaia, where Corinth was located (1 Thess. 1:7, 8), and in 1 Thessalonians he was responding to information brought to him by Timothy (1 Thess. 3:5, 6).

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:2. What’s Paul’s main point in this passage? What do we learn from these verses about Paul’s missionary strategies in Athens and Corinth?

Paul must not have been satisfied with the outcome of his encounter with the philosophers of Athens, for in Corinth he decides to take a more direct approach to the Greek mind. In doing so, he does not reject the idea of “meeting people where they are,” for he clearly promotes such an approach in the same letter (1 Cor. 9:19–23). What he demonstrates in Athens and Corinth is that the process of meeting people where they are is not an exact science; it requires constant learning and adjustment. Paul did not take the same approach in every city. He was very sensitive to changing times, cultures, and circumstances.

Read again the passages for today. How is the main message there relevant for us today, when the “wisdom” of the world so often clashes with the “foolishness” of the Cross?
Paul Reveals His Heart

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:10. What does this passage tell us about Paul’s emotional attachment and relationship to these believers? What can we learn from it regarding the ways in which we should relate with those to whom we minister?

Paul’s depth of thought and confrontational tone (see, for example, Gal. 1:6, 7; 3:1–4; 4:9–11) sometimes make him appear dismissive of feelings and personal relationships. But this delightful interlude in 1 Thessalonians shows otherwise. He was an intensely relational evangelist along the lines of the Great Commission, which places primary emphasis on the making of disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20).

In the above passage Paul reveals his inner emotions. He misses the Thessalonian believers with “intense longing.” When Jesus comes, Paul intends to present the Thessalonian believers to Jesus as examples of his ministry. Paul is not content merely to be saved at the end of time; he wants evidence that his life made a permanent difference for the kingdom of God.

When Paul can “no longer endure” his intense longing for the Thessalonians, he sends a mutual friend to learn how they are doing. Paul is afraid that somehow Satan might lure them away from their original convictions. But he is comforted tremendously when Timothy reports that they are standing firm in the faith.

There is an interesting hint of a deeper dynamic in 1 Thessalonians 3:6. Paul rejoices at Timothy’s report that they have a good opinion of him and that they are longing to see him as much as he is longing to see them. Paul’s departure from Thessalonica was sudden, and he seems to have some uncertainty about the way in which they viewed him and his absence. Thessalonian faithfulness made a big difference to Paul. Paul’s sense of personal worth was, perhaps, to some degree tied to the success of his mission. He was, after all, only human.

Timothy’s report brings Paul an intense experience of joy in his prayers to God. But his present joy does not squelch his intense longing to see them face to face and to complete their education in the Christian walk. However, unable to be personally present with them, Paul first sends an emissary, Timothy, and then engages the Thessalonians by letter. Those letters make up part of the New Testament corpus.
Further Study: “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one. But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given up. It is our privilege to lay this burden at the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. The Saviour is waiting for us to do this.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, pp. 189, 190, emphasis added.

“During His ministry, Jesus had kept constantly before the disciples the fact that they were to be one with Him in His work for the recovery of the world from the slavery of sin. . . . In all His work He was training them for individual labor, to be extended as their numbers increased, and eventually to reach to the uttermost parts of the earth.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 32.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss your answer to Monday’s final question. How can we avoid making the same kind of mistakes? Or are we in some cases making them even now?

2. In Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 189 (see today’s Further Study), Ellen White identifies “self” as the barrier to both a more powerful outreach and more conversions among the lost. In what ways does “self” manifest itself in our lives? How can we learn to die to self? What is the only true way to be able to do that?

3. The central focus of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV) is to “make disciples.” Share some of your own experiences of being or making a disciple. To what degree is your own church discipleship oriented? How can it become more so?

4. How can you explain to someone the “foolishness” of the Cross? Why do you think Paul used that terminology? What should that tell us about how limited our understanding of reality can be when the most important of all truths is deemed “foolishness” by many?

Summary: In a mere three weeks, Paul had become intensely bonded to the new believers in Thessalonica. Not being able to return to them, he first sent Timothy. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, he also put his heart into two letters. Meaningful evangelism must not settle for mere acceptance of Christian beliefs. The whole life—physical, mental, and emotional—is involved in Christian faith.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:10

**The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that true evangelism involves building close and caring relationships with the people to whom he or she ministers.

Feel: Sense the need to invest not only time but his or her life in the people that he or she is influencing spiritually for Christ.

Do: Resolve to make the people to whom he or she ministers his or her primary focus rather than the act of ministry itself.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Relationships Are at the Heart of Ministry

- A Paul always shared a close relationship with the people to whom he evangelized. Why are personal relationships so important for leading others to Jesus?

- B What different metaphors does the apostle Paul use in 1 Thessalonians 2:7–11 to describe the nature of his relationship with the Thessalonians?

II. Feel: Genuine Concern for Others

- A Examine the words that Paul uses in connection to the word you in 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:5. On the basis of this terminology, describe Paul’s feelings toward the believers in Thessalonica.

- B Why is it so important to have and to express genuine concern for the people whom we want to reach?

- C Who was the most influential person in your spiritual development? Describe the nature of his or her relationship to you and what made it so significant.

III. Do: Investing in Others

- A Who are the individuals that God has brought under your spiritual influence? What steps could you take to strengthen your personal relationships with them?

**Summary:** Building close relationships with the people to whom we are ministering is the result of true evangelism.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Paul’s tender concern for the believers in Thessalonica is an example of the type of caring relationships that God desires to develop in us and with people to whom we minister.

Just for Teachers: For many people, evangelism is all about reaching a baptismal goal. While baptisms are important, sometimes the new converts are forgotten after they are baptized. With few genuine friends within the church, the new members often end up leaving the church not long afterward. This week’s lesson is an important reminder that true evangelism should result in the formation of new and close relationships that last forever.

It happens all the time in churches. An evangelistic series of meetings results in new converts coming through the front doors of the church, while a little while later, they disappear out the back door. More often than not the problem is not that the new believers stopped believing but that they never really felt part of the church. They may have joined the church intellectually but not relationally. They may have felt open to developing a relationship with the evangelist or the pastor, but once the meetings ended and life within the church went back to normal, they felt like the odd person out in a game of musical chairs. Without close relationships with their spiritual mentors, they did not have the personal relationships that could have helped to anchor them in their new decision.

Opening Activity: After sharing with the class the scenario presented above, invite individual class members who were not raised in the church to describe how they joined the church. Next, ask them what it was that helped them to remain in the church when so many converts don’t stay. Be sure to highlight the importance of forming relationships with new converts, an essential component that will certainly be part of the stories.

Discuss: Why is the building of relationships with new converts such an important part of evangelism?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. New Converts in Thessalonica (Review Acts 17:1–4 with the class.)

Paul must have been overjoyed at the initial response to his proclamation of the gospel in Thessalonica—especially after the beating that Silas and he had received in Philippi (Acts 16:22–24). Not only were some Jews persuaded by Paul’s reasoning, but a number of devout Gentiles, including several prominent women, also decided to become members of Paul’s newly organized house church. The description of these new converts should not be overlooked. Luke is careful to point out that the Christian message was not some kind of religious farce designed to take advantage of the gullible; it was a well-reasoned presentation that appealed to Jews and Gentiles of intelligence—and not merely men but also women of significant social rank.

A close reading of Acts also reveals the names and a few details about three of the new believers in Thessalonica. The first person we meet is Jason, Paul’s host. Jason appears to be a Greek-speaking Jew, given the fact that this name was common among Jewish men who, like Paul, grew up outside of Palestine. Jason must have been a man of some means, because his home was large enough to host Paul and to also serve as the house church for the believers.

The next two names are introduced later in Acts: Aristarchus and Secundus. According to Acts 20:4, these two men were from Thessalonica and had been appointed to journey with Paul to Jerusalem, bearing a financial gift that was intended to demonstrate the goodwill and unity of the Gentile churches with their fellow Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Secundus was a Gentile Christian (his Roman name means the “second” son of his father). Aristarchus was a Jewish Christian (Col. 4:10, 11) who became an especially close friend of Paul’s. He accompanied Paul on his travels and even shared in his imprisonment (Acts 19:29, 27:2, Philemon 24).

Consider This: Paul’s evangelistic success resulted not only in the making of lifelong friends but also in the making of enemies. Does the latter always have to be the case? Why, or why not?

II. Trouble in Thessalonica (Review Acts 17:5–9 with the class.)

According to Acts 17:5, Paul’s success in Thessalonica infuriated some of the Jews who were not persuaded by his message. Jealous of Paul’s success with the Gentiles, and certainly not very happy that some of their fellow countrymen had joined him, they decided to enlist the help of “some wicked men of the
rabble” *(ESV)* to stir up trouble. In Greek the phrase “wicked men of the rabble” literally means “men of the marketplace.” It refers to a group of unemployed ruffians who hung out in the marketplace looking for something to do. What a contrast to the people who responded to Paul’s gospel.

According to Luke, these hooligans barged into Jason’s home in order to drag Paul out to the crowd *(17:5).* The Greek word translated as “people,” or “crowd” *(demos)*, can also refer to the public assembly of citizens who had authority over local legal matters. Unable to lay their hands on Paul, they decided instead to haul Jason and others before the local magistrates. When they arrived, they laid two accusations against Paul: (1) Paul was an itinerant troublemaker with a track record of causing problems in other cities; (2) Paul was guilty of sedition for claiming that Jesus, not Caesar, was King. Sufficiently alarmed by these charges, the magistrates banned Paul and Silas from their city and required Jason to pay some kind of fee in order to ensure that the two men would not return.

**Consider This:** Although the charges against Paul were certainly misconstrued, there was some element of truth in them. To what extent should evangelistic preaching challenge the status quo today?

**III. Paul’s Concern for the New Converts** *(Review 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:10 with the class.)*

Paul’s abrupt departure from Thessalonica left him in anguish about the spiritual well-being of his new converts. What had happened to them? Were they holding onto their faith in the midst of persecution? Or were the Jews who were responsible for Paul’s departure from Thessalonica, and who had hounded him all the way to Berea, making life miserable for the believers too?

After weeks of bouncing from one town to another and worrying about the fate of the believers whom he had left so suddenly in Thessalonica, Paul was an emotional wreck. In the span of only a few short verses, in 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:10, Paul repeatedly talks about his desire to see them, his distress, his afflictions, and twice he mentions his inability to bear this burden any longer. Another interesting glimpse into Paul’s state of mind is the way in which he describes his sudden departure from Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 2:17. The phrase “torn away” *(ESV)* comes from a Greek word *(aporphaniz)* and means “to make an orphan” of someone. In other words, Paul likens the deep anguish he feels with that of a parent bereft of a child. In this state of mind, Paul certainly must have wondered whether he and his fellow workers had been divinely called to Macedonia or not *(Acts 16:9, 10).*

The gloom that threatened to submerge Paul and Silas was overcome by Timothy’s positive report about the situation in Thessalonica. The fact that the gospel had taken root in Thessalonica, despite adversity and persecution, renewed their confidence that God had indeed called them to Macedonia.
Consider This: Paul’s concern for the new converts in Thessalonica lasted well beyond his “evangelistic campaign.” What does this tell us about the type of relationships that should accompany evangelism?

▶STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. Paul does not say in what way Satan hindered him from returning to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18). How did he respond? What lessons about endurance and resilience can we learn from Paul’s response to the hardships and obstacles that challenged him?

2. As the lesson says, in 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:10, Paul reveals his heart to the Thessalonians. How important is it for us to share our feelings and concerns with those to whom we are ministering?

Application Questions:

1. Evangelism was certainly uppermost in Paul’s mind. How evangelistic is your church? How evangelistic minded are you? What can you do to improve?

2. Paul had a burden for the spiritual stability of the new converts in Thessalonica and took action, not only to see how they were doing but to encourage them in their walk. How have you or your church sought to encourage the new members within your congregation?

3. Paul says that his hope, joy, and crown of boasting are not what he will receive at the Second Coming but rather that they are the converts whom he will see on that day. What does this tell us about what our priorities should be as Christians?

▶STEP 4—Create

Activity: As we have seen in our lesson this week, true evangelism should result in caring relationships that last forever. As a class, come up with a list of new believers who have joined your congregation within the past year. In addition to making a decision to set aside a little time to pray for these people during this next week, as a class come up with a plan that will help you to reach out to these new members so that they will feel loved and supported by their church family.
Joyous and Thankful
(1 Thess. 1:1–10)

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Thess. 1:1–10, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 Tim. 1:15, Gal. 5:19–23, Dan. 12:2.

Memory Text: “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3, ESV).

Key Thought: Paul has many good things to say to the Thessalonians, at least when he begins writing to them in the first letter. What he praises them for is worthy of our attention.

Paul opens his first letter to the Thessalonians by emphasizing prayer and stressing how much he prays for them, which itself reveals the deep love and concern he has for the church there.

In this passage Paul then rejoices that the Thessalonians, on the whole, appear to be remaining faithful. Their lives offer abundant evidence of the life-changing power of the Spirit, despite the many challenges that they face.

Paul concludes his first chapter by remarking how the Thessalonians’ openness to Paul and his teaching led them to become true “Adventists.” They were believers who lived every day in anticipation of the day that Jesus would come from heaven to deliver them from “the wrath to come.”

In this lesson we get an intimate glimpse of how new converts dealt with the challenges that come after evangelism has taken place.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 28.*
A Prayer of Thanks (1 Thess. 1:1–3)

In the opening words of 1 Thessalonians, we catch a glimpse of the selflessness of Paul. While he was clearly the author of this letter (1 Thess. 2:18, 3:5, 5:27), he gives recognition to his coworkers Silas and Timothy.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1–3. For what things are Paul, Silas, and Timothy giving thanks? What do these things mean in a practical sense? That is, how would they be manifested in daily life? For example, how is the “work of faith” expressed in how we live?

The opening of this letter is typical of ancient Greek letters, but with an interesting twist. To the typical Greek opener (“grace”), Paul adds the familiar Jewish greeting “peace” (shalom in Hebrew). “Grace” and “peace”—apt depictions of what an experience with Jesus is all about.

Who was Silvanus? The name reflects the Latin equivalent of the Aramaic name “Silas.” Jews who lived outside Palestine usually adopted Greek or Latin names to go along with their Jewish ones (this is how “Saul” became “Paul”). Silas was a Jerusalem Christian like Mark, who was one of Paul’s first traveling companions. By having trusted leaders of the Jerusalem church with him on his missionary journeys, Paul was doing his best to maintain unity in the church.

What group of words in 1 Thessalonians 1:1–3 has become famous because of the way they are used in 1 Corinthians 13? Which of them has the primary emphasis in 1 Corinthians, and why?

In his prayers, Paul concentrates on reality, not giddy spirituality. Faith provokes serious work. Genuine love produces much labor. And hope requires much patience. The stress in these words is on action, not abstract ideas. The order of faith, love, and hope varies in the New Testament, but the most important of the three is listed last in each case (see 1 Cor. 13:13). The order of these words in verse 3 underlines the importance of last-day events in Paul’s mind throughout the writing of these two letters to the Thessalonians.

Paul is also thankful before God because he remembers the way in which the Thessalonians have responded to the gospel. He probably hopes, too, that their positive emotional response to the praise Paul offers them will incline them to be more open to the concerns that he will soon express to them.
God Has Chosen You (1 Thess. 1:4)

**Read** 1 Thessalonians 1:4. What does it mean that God has chosen or elected us? Does that mean we don’t really have a choice? On the other hand, does it mean that someone who is not chosen by God cannot have salvation even if he or she wants it?

Verse 4 continues the same extended sentence that Paul began in verse 2, with “we give thanks.” One of the reasons Paul gives thanks to God is that he knows God has “chosen” the Thessalonians.

Some Christians have taken this idea of being “chosen” to an extreme. They want to move the believer away from any focus on lifestyle or behavior. Instead, they teach that our salvation depends on God’s choice rather than on our own. Such a teaching can also lead to the idea that God’s grace is only for a few and that, once saved, a person cannot choose to be lost.

**How** do the following texts help us to understand that salvation is our own choice? *Josh. 24:15, 1 Tim. 2:4, Rev. 3:20.*

Faith is impossible without God’s drawing power. Yet, in the end, God allows human beings to make their own decisions regarding Him and what He has done for us. And what He has done for us is to “choose” us in Christ. We have all been “elected” to have salvation. That some won’t be saved—won’t claim that salvation for themselves—reflects their choice, not God’s. God’s choice is for all humanity to be saved. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:4, God wants “all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” *(NKJV).*

**Think through what it means to know that you have been “chosen” by God, that God wants you to have salvation, and that to be lost is an aberration from God’s desire for all of us. What encouragement can you draw from this wonderful truth?**
Assurance in Christ (1 Thess. 1:5)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5. How do we gain the assurance that we are right with God? What three evidences in the lives of the Thessalonians indicated to Paul that they were right with God?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Verse 5 begins with “for” or “because.” In this verse Paul details the grounds for his conviction that the Thessalonians were “chosen” by God (1 Thess. 1:4). He is also underlining further reasons as to why his prayers are so filled with thankfulness (1 Thess. 1:2). Paul rejoices at the real-life evidence that the Thessalonians have responded to God and that He approves of them.

Paul begins the verse with rejoicing at a visible and outward sign of the Thessalonians’ position before the Lord. Their acceptance of the gospel was not merely a mental assent to teachings or doctrine. Their daily lives exhibited the presence and power of God. In everyday church life, things were happening that could be explained only as divine intervention. Prayers were answered and lives changed. The reality of their faith was being manifested in their works.

How does one know that the Holy Spirit is present and real in one’s life and in the local church? See Gal. 5:19–23, 1 Cor. 12:1–11.

The “fruit” of the Spirit is powerful evidence that God is actively working. Things such as love, joy, and peace can be faked only for so long, but in the day-to-day stress of relationships within the church, the genuine is eventually sifted from the false. When the Holy Spirit is a living presence, things that are not natural to sinful human beings start to become natural in the life of the believer. Christians find themselves doing acts of grace and kindness that would not have occurred to them before. Paul saw plenty of evidence that the lives of the Thessalonians had been changed by the supernatural working of the Spirit.

For Paul, the final evidence that God had chosen the Thessalonians was their deep conviction and inner assurance that the gospel was true and that God was real in their lives. Though such convictions don’t prove true in every case, strong assurance that we are right with God usually accompanies the genuine gospel.

How much assurance of salvation do you have? On what, in the end, must that assurance be based?
Doing What Paul Would Do (1 Thess. 1:6, 7)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7. What is Paul’s message there? How are we to understand this in light of the idea that Christ is our ultimate example?

Most translations do not show this, but in verse 6 Paul continues the same sentence that he began in verse 2 and carries it on through verse 10. The main topic of this lengthy sentence is Paul’s list of reasons for the thanksgivings that he recites in his prayers. Verses 6 and 7 add two items to that list of thanksgivings, building on the “because” (NIV) at the beginning of verse 5. Paul gives thanks (vs. 2) because (vs. 5, NIV) the Thessalonians have both imitated him and his colleagues and have themselves become an example to imitate (vss. 6, 7).

We often caution people that it is dangerous to imitate anyone but Christ. That’s true, because even the best of people will let us down sometimes. But in reality we need role models. People need each other at times for guidance, counsel, and help in working through specific issues and even hard times. Who hasn’t experienced the blessing of good counsel and of a good example?

Also, whether we like it or not, once we become leaders in the church, people will imitate us. How important, then, that “veteran” Christians live what they preach and model the things that they say.

At the same time, Paul has placed a couple of safeguards here. First of all, the imitation (vs. 6) follows the receiving (vs. 5). The primary focus of the Thessalonians was on receiving the Word of God and applying it directly to their lives through the Holy Spirit. God’s Word can always be trusted. Second, Paul directs them to the Lord as the primary model (vs. 6). What Jesus did, and would do, is a much safer model than what even Paul would do. After all, Paul was under no illusions about himself or his character (1 Tim. 1:15).

Having said this, however, Paul affirms their desire to imitate him as a beloved teacher and mentor and also to become models worthy of imitation themselves. In this particular case, what was being modeled was joy in suffering. Suffering can make one bitter or better. In the context of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Thessalonians discovered supernatural joy in the midst of suffering, just as Paul and Silas had earlier (Acts 16:22–25).

What kind of role model are you in the church? What ways in which you conduct yourself about your life are good for others to follow? What ways aren’t?
Further Evidence of Faith (1 Thess. 1:8–10)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:8–10. In what ways does this passage offer additional evidence of the Thessalonians’ faith?

Paul continues the sentence that began in verse 2 by explaining how he knows the Thessalonians have become a model, or type, to the other believers in Macedonia (where Thessalonica was located) and Achaia (where Corinth was located).

First, they were a model of evangelistic effort and success. From them the word of God “rang out” (NIV) into both of these provinces and beyond. Paul also considered them to have a model faith because of their openness to him and the gospel. They were willing to be taught. They were also willing to make radical changes in their lives, such as giving up idols and other popular forms of worship.

Communication was relatively rapid in the ancient Roman world, thanks to well-built Roman roads and widespread travel. So, the claim that their faith was known “everywhere” may indicate that people in places such as Rome and Antioch had already made reference to it in their communications with Paul.

It is also true that people want to live up to the high expectations of others. Praise contains an implied expectation. By praising their faith in such an overwhelming fashion, Paul was encouraging them to grow in that faith more and more.

It seems there was something uniquely remarkable about their conversion. As pagan idolaters they had to overcome two major barriers. First was the “crazy message” about some man who was dead and came back to life again. Then there was the fact that it was a crazy Jewish message. Many Gentiles probably laughed when they heard the Christian message. The Thessalonians didn’t. Instead, they completely rearranged their lives in light of the gospel.

“The Thessalonian believers were true missionaries. Their hearts burned with zeal for their Saviour, who had delivered them from fear of ‘the wrath to come.’ Through the grace of Christ a marvelous transformation had taken place in their lives, and the word of the Lord, as spoken through them, was accompanied with power. Hearts were won by the truths presented, and souls were added to the number of believers.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 256.

Read again 1 Thessalonians 1:10. What’s Paul talking about? What is the “wrath to come”? What does the resurrection of Jesus have to do with the point he is making? Why is this promise so crucial to all that we believe? See 1 Cor. 15:12–17; John 11:24, 25; Dan. 12:2.
Further Study: “The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, during Paul’s sojourn in Corinth, had greatly cheered the apostle. They brought him ‘good tidings’ of the ‘faith and charity’ of those who had accepted the truth during the first visit of the gospel messengers to Thessalonica. Paul’s heart went out in tender sympathy toward these believers, who, in the midst of trial and adversity, had remained true to God. He longed to visit them in person, but as this was not then possible, he wrote to them.

“In this letter to the church at Thessalonica the apostle expresses his gratitude to God for the joyful news of their increase of faith. . . .

“ ‘We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.’

“Many of the believers in Thessalonica had ‘turned . . . from idols to serve the living and true God.’ . . . The apostle declared that in their faithfulness in following the Lord they were ‘ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.’ ”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 255, 256.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell more on the question of role models, other than Jesus. What advantages and disadvantages come with them?

2. Paul spends a great portion of this letter giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians. What role can, or should, thanksgiving play in our worship experience, both personally and corporately?

3. If people around you were looking for evidence of your church’s faith, what would they find? How could, or should, things be different?

4. Why is affirmation of others so important? At the same time, why must we be careful as we do this?

5. Think through again how important the doctrine of the Second Coming is to our faith. What good reasons do we have for trusting in something that’s so radical, that’s so unlike anything that has ever happened before?

Summary: Paul found much joy in offering thanks to God for the abundant evidences of His work in the lives of the Thessalonian believers. In sharing the content of his prayers with them, Paul hoped to motivate them to continue growing in the faith and in their outreach efforts toward others.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

The Student Will:

Know: Comprehend that accepting God’s gift of salvation in Jesus results in a fundamental change in the way a person thinks and acts.
Feel: Be grateful to God for the work He does in the lives of sinful humans.
Do: Seek to be more positive and expressive about the evidence that he or she sees of spiritual growth in the lives of others.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Transforming Grace
   A Paul begins each one of his letters with the words grace and peace. Why do you think that Paul used these words at the beginning of every letter that he wrote?
   B Why do you think Paul repeatedly refers to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in the first ten verses of this letter?
   C On the basis of what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10, describe the change that took place when the Thessalonians became Christians.

II. Feel: Grateful to God
   A Learning to be grateful to God is an important part of the Christian life. What reasons does Paul list for his thankfulness in 1 Thessalonians 1:1–8? Do you have similar cause for being thankful? If so, what reasons can you share?
   B Becoming a Christian marks a fundamental change in a person’s life. For some the change is dramatic while for others it is gradual. How has your life been transformed by God’s grace?

III. Do: Affirming of Others
   A How have others encouraged you in your Christian experience?
   B In what ways do you seek to encourage others in their walk with God?

Summary: Christians should be thankful for the way God’s grace can transform a person’s life and be encouraging of those in whose lives His Spirit is at work.
Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: It is important for Christians to recognize, and be grateful for, the ways in which God transforms human lives. It is important also to be willing to share words of encouragement with those in need.

Several years ago, during an attempted coup in Africa, a father was worried for days about the safety of his son and his family who lived near one of the presidential palaces that had been overrun by rebels. News finally reached him that his son and his family were safe, though they were not allowed to leave their compound. While the father was greatly relieved at the news, he was still a little worried, because his son’s family was not completely out of danger.

Have you ever experienced a situation like that—one in which you were encouraged about news you had heard but still a little worried about how everything would work out in the end? That is exactly how the apostle Paul felt after hearing Timothy’s report about the condition of the believers in Thessalonica. He was encouraged to hear that they had remained faithful, but he was still a little worried as they faced continual persecution.

Knowing how easy it is to forget what God has done for us, Paul begins his letter by affirming and reminding the believers in Thessalonica of all the ways in which God has been working in their lives. And because spiritual discouragement is a typical response to persecution, the apostle also reminds them of how valuable they are to God. God loves them; He chose them for Himself. They should not become discouraged. God is on their side.

Paul’s words of encouragement bring to mind a story that illustrates the importance of the need of encouraging one another spiritually. The story is about a discouraged new convert who came to talk with the well-known Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee.

“'No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I’m losing my salvation.’ Nee said, ‘Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ’s heir because it is for you that He died.’”—Lou Nicholes, Hebrews: Patterns for Living (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2004), p. 31.
Consider This: What can we learn from Paul’s affirmation of the Thessalonians regarding the ways in which we should affirm others?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**I. Paul’s Favorite Words** *(Review 1 Thessalonians 1:1–8 with the class.)*

The opening three verses of 1 Thessalonians introduce us to five of Paul’s favorite words: *grace, peace, faith, hope,* and *love*. Paul refers to each of these words again and again in his letters. Because they were central to his understanding of the gospel, it behooves us to look briefly at them.

**Grace:** Paul’s understanding of the word *grace* is rooted in its use in the Hebrew Scriptures. The word originated from a Hebrew verb that literally means “to bend down.” It conveys the idea of a person bending over to help someone stand up who has fallen and cannot help himself. From this concept, the word *grace* came to mean the act of extending favor or kindness to another person and often someone who did not deserve it. In the Old Testament, as in Paul’s letters, God is the One who is typically described as extending grace.

**Peace:** Peace for Paul does not refer to a quiet stillness like a peaceful meadow. Paul’s concept of this word again comes from the way in which it is used in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Old Testament the word for peace is *shalom*. It has a very positive concept to it. It means to be complete, to be whole, to prosper, to be in health. This peace can be found only in God, who gives it as a gift to His people (*Ps. 85:8; 1 Chron. 22:9, 10; Num. 6:24–26)*.

**Faith:** True faith for Paul is much more than just head knowledge; true faith manifests itself in action *(compare Gal. 5:5, 6)*. Faith is always a response to what God has already done for us.

**Hope:** The hope Paul mentions is not “wishful thinking.” It is a confident expectation in the return of Jesus *(1 Thess. 1:10)*. This hope was the source of the patience and steadfastness that encouraged the Thessalonian believers to be faithful during persecution.

**Love:** The love manifested by the believers in Thessalonica was not merely a warm, sentimental feeling. Paul says that their love was rugged; it “labored.” This type of love is not natural to humans. The word in Greek is *agape*. Before Christians began to use this word, it was rarely used in the Greek language. Christians used it to refer to a love not rooted in outward attraction or
self-gratification but the kind of selfless love seen in the life of Jesus.

Consider This: Grace. Peace. Faith. Hope. Love. Why is it difficult, if not impossible, to describe the gospel without returning to these five words?

II. Paul’s Gospel Message (Review 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10 with the class.)

What was the essence of Paul’s gospel presentation to the Gentiles in Thessalonica? While Luke provides no indication of this in Acts, we find some clues in what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10 in which he reminds the new believers of what he has taught them. Based on these verses, we come away with the following picture.

The very first step that Paul would have taken in presenting the gospel to Gentiles would have been to argue against the existence of the pagan deities being worshiped by the Thessalonians. Because Paul refers to the “living and true God” (vs. 9, ESV), he certainly would have argued that the so-called pagan gods were dead and false. The only true God was the God of Israel, the God who made the heavens and the earth and chose and blessed Israel as His people. Given that Judaism was widespread in Paul’s day, it is likely that many of the pagans had heard of the Jewish God before. Paul probably appealed to stories from the Old Testament in his attempts to convince his audience of the power of this one God over all the earth.

After convincing the Gentiles that the God of Israel was the one true God, Paul argued that Jesus was this one God’s only unique Son. Whether Paul said anything about Jesus’ life before His death is uncertain, given that he does not do this in the rest of his letters. What is certain, however, is that the apostle talked about how Jesus’ death (1 Thess. 5:10) and resurrection (1 Thess. 4:14) were “necessary” in order to restore sinful humans in right relationship with God. And most important, he talked of how this same Jesus would soon return from heaven (1 Thess. 2:19, 3:13, 4:13–18, 5:1–11) to judge those on the earth.

Consider This: Based on the content of Paul’s gospel message, including the five words that were essential to his explanation of it, what do you think Paul meant when he said that the gospel came to Thessalonica not in word only but in power?

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. In what ways is the triad of faith, hope, and love used elsewhere in the
New Testament *(see 1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:4, 5; 1 Thess. 5:8)*? In what ways can these characteristics be emphasized more fully in the life of the church today?

Paul includes the turning from idols as part of the conversion experience of the Thessalonians. What types of idols might people need to turn away from today in order to follow Christ?

**Application Questions:**

1. News of the transformation that took place in the lives of the Thessalonians reached all across Greece. What type of reputation does your church have in and outside of your community? And how could a church increase or improve the way in which its faith “sounds forth”?

2. In what way does your faith “work,” your love “labor,” and your hope remain steadfast?

3. Paul often talks about the power of the gospel *(Rom. 1:16, 1 Cor. 1:18, 2 Cor. 12:9, Eph. 1:19, 1 Thess. 1:5)*. In what ways have you experienced the “power” of the gospel?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The following activities will help to make the information in this lesson more personal. Be sure to encourage people to be brief in their responses in order to discourage one or two people from dominating the conversation.

**Activity:**

1. Invite people in class to share about the time when they first understood the gospel and decided to accept Jesus as their Savior.

2. Have class members briefly share specific ways in which their lives have been transformed by the gospel.

3. Ask the class to briefly share experiences where they were spiritually encouraged by something that someone said or did for them.

4. Have class members list ways in which they might provide spiritual encouragement to struggling believers.
Lesson 5  *July 28–August 3  
(page 38 of Standard Edition)  

The Apostolic Example  
(1 Thess. 2:1–12)  

Sabbath Afternoon  


Memory Text: “But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4, ESV).  

Key Thought: By revealing what the true motive in ministry must be, Paul can help us all to examine our hearts and lives in light of the gospel.  

This week’s lesson marks a major transition from the arguments of the first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul moves from a focus on the church (1 Thess. 1:2–10) to a focus on the apostles and their experience in Thessalonica (2:1–12). In the previous chapter Paul gives thanks to God because the believers in Thessalonica modeled their lives on Paul and, in turn, became models of faithfulness themselves. Now, in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, Paul probes more deeply into the kind of life that enables the apostles to function as role models.  

While there are many possible motivations for teaching, preaching, and service, Paul puts his finger on the one that matters most: ministry that will be pleasing to God. Paul was less concerned with growing the church in numbers than with its growing, through God’s grace, in the right spiritual principles.  

In this lesson we glimpse Paul’s innermost life. Paul bares his soul in a way that challenges us to align our own spiritual hopes, dreams, and motivations so that we will please God and have the right influence on others.  

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 4.*
Boldness in Suffering (1 Thess. 2:1, 2)

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1, 2 in light of Acts 16. What connection does Paul draw between his earlier ministry in Philippi and his ministry in Thessalonica?

First Thessalonians 2:1 picks up on the themes of the first chapter. The “you yourselves know” (NKJV) of this verse recalls the same language in 1 Thessalonians 1:5. And Paul’s reference to “coming” or gaining “entrance” with the church recalls 1 Thessalonians 1:9. So, Paul is continuing the themes that he raised in the opening chapter of the letter. The end of the previous chapter was concerned with what “everybody” knew about the Thessalonians. In this chapter he discusses what the readers know about the apostles and their commitment to the faith.

Paul recalls how he and Silas were shamefully treated in Philippi on account of preaching the gospel. On the long road from Philippi to Thessalonica, every step was a painful reminder of that treatment. No doubt they bore outward signs of their pain, even upon arriving in Thessalonica. It would have been easy at that point for the apostles to take a less direct approach to evangelism in the new city. After all that they had just been through, who would have blamed them?

But the Thessalonians proved eager and open for the truth. Reality said, “Don’t ever preach the gospel again.” But in the midst of their pain and suffering, God was saying to Paul and Silas: Be bold. Be strong. So, they “began to be bold” (1 Thess. 2:2, author’s translation) in spite of the likelihood that persecution would arise again. There was a strong and visible contrast between their human condition (and all the frailties that come with it) and their empowerment by God.

In the end, the Lord used these outward circumstances to His glory. The visible wounds of the preachers provided evidence of two things to the Thessalonians. First, the gospel they preached truly came from their personal conviction. They were not doing it for personal advantage (see 1 Thess. 2:3–6). Second, it was clear to the hearers that God was with Paul and Silas in a mighty way. The gospel that they preached was not just an intellectual construct; it was accompanied by the living presence of the Lord as revealed in the lives of the apostles (see vs. 13).

What would you point to as evidence that God has changed your life? How is this evidence visible to others? Or is it visible at all?
The Character of the Apostles
(1 Thess. 2:3)

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:3. What key point is Paul making there about motives?

It was widely known in the ancient world that there were three keys of persuading people to change their ideas or practices. People judge the power of an argument on the character of the speaker (in Greek: *ethos*), the quality or logic of the argument itself (*logos*), and the power of the speaker’s appeal to the listener’s emotions or self-interest (*pathos*). In 1 Thessalonians 2:3–6 Paul focuses on the character of the apostles as a key element of the preaching that led to radical changes in the Thessalonians.

In these verses, Paul draws a contrast between himself and the popular philosophers, whose preaching was often motivated by personal benefit (see lesson 3). Paul uses three words in verse 3 to describe possible bad motivations for preaching or ministry.

The first word is *error*, an intellectual mistake. A preacher may be excited about an idea that is simply wrong. He or she may be perfectly sincere but self-deceived. They think they are doing good for others but are motivated by false ideas.

The second word is *uncleanness*, or *impurity*. People are attracted to individuals who are widely known for their power, ideas, or performance. Some public figures can be motivated by the sexual opportunities that come with fame or notoriety.

The third word is best translated as *deception*, or *trickery*. In this case the speaker is aware that the ideas being presented are wrong but is consciously trying to mislead people in order to benefit himself.

Paul and Silas were not motivated by any of these. If they had been, their experience in Philippi would probably have made them quit preaching. The boldness that they exhibited in Thessalonica was made possible only by the power of God working through them. The power that the gospel had in Thessalonica (*see 1 Thess. 1:5*) was in part due to the character of the apostles, which shone through in their presentations. Logical arguments and emotional appeals were not enough. Their characters were in accordance with their claims. Such authenticity has tremendous power in today’s world, as it did in ancient times.

Think through your own motives for all that you do. How pure are they, how free are they of error, deceit, and impurity? If they are not what they should be, how can you change for the better? *See also Deut. 10:16, Phil. 4:13, Ps. 51:1–10.*
Pleasing God (1 Thess. 2:4–6)

**Read** 1 Thessalonians 2:4–6. Describe the contrast between Paul’s motivation for ministry and the worldly alternatives he mentions. Why is it not always so easy to see the differences; that is, how can people deceive themselves regarding the purity of their own motives? Why is this so easy to do?

The word often translated as “approved” (1 Thess. 2:4) reflects the idea of testing or examination. The apostles allowed God to test the integrity of their lives and intentions. The purpose of that testing was to make sure that the gospel they shared would not be distorted by a contrast between what they preached and how they lived.

The popular philosophers of the day wrote about the importance of self-examination. If you want to make a difference in the world, they taught, you need to examine constantly your motives and intentions. Paul takes this idea one step further. He taught that in addition to self-examination, he was examined by God. God verified that what Paul preached was consistent with his inner life. In the ultimate sense, God is the only one worth pleasing.

Human beings need a sense of worth in order to function. We often seek this worth by accumulating possessions, by achievements, or through the positive opinions that others express about us. But all these sources of self-worth are fragile and so temporary. Genuine and lasting self-worth is found only through the gospel. When we fully grasp that Christ died for us, we begin to experience a sense of worth that nothing in this world can shake.

**What** does 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 6 add to the three motivations listed in verse 3?

The concept of flattery picks up on the theme of pleasing people, a poor basis for evangelism. Paul is not motivated by what other people think of him. He also rules out another worldly motivation for ministry: money. People who have been blessed by someone’s ministry are usually eager to give money to that ministry or to buy its products. This can tempt God’s workers to lose their focus on the only motivation that really matters, pleasing God.

**What in your life pleases God, and why? What doesn’t, and why not?**
Caring Deeply (1 Thess. 2:7, 8)

In 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Paul’s primary motivation for ministry is to please God. What additional motivation does Paul bring up in the verses that follow? See 1 Thess. 2:6–8.

In today’s world, money, sex, and power are often considered the primary motivations for human behavior, at least for those consumed by self-interest. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3–6, Paul uses a number of different words to rule out similar motivations in relation to his ministry. Greed, immorality, deception, and flattery have no place in Christian life and ministry. The apostles were motivated primarily by the desire to please God in all that they did.

In verse 6 Paul notes that the apostles could have been a burden to the Thessalonians, or literally could have “thrown their weight around.” As apostles and teachers they could have demanded recognition of their status. They could have expected to receive monetary favors and to be treated with special honor. But in Thessalonica Paul declined anything that could have compromised his motives or that could have put a stumbling block in the way of the new converts.

While Paul’s primary motivation was to please God, in verses 7 and 8 he expresses an additional motivation—his great affection for the Thessalonians themselves. Verse 8 uses the language of emotional warmth. Preaching the gospel was much more than a duty for Paul; he gave his heart, even his whole self, to the people.

How did the churches of Macedonia, of which Thessalonica was a part, respond to the tenderness of the apostles? See 2 Cor. 8:1–5. What does this teach us about the importance of character in the lives of those who witness to others?

In Monday’s lesson we mentioned the three ancient keys to persuasion: the character of the speaker (ethos), the logic of the argument (logos), and the appeal to emotion or self-interest (pathos). In verses 4–6 Paul emphasized the character of the apostles as being a reason to follow them. In verses 7 and 8 we see an appeal to pathos, the emotional bond that developed between the apostles and the Thessalonians. The gospel is at its most powerful when it touches the heart.

Think about the character of someone who influenced you in a positive way spiritually. What was it in particular that touched you? How can you learn to emulate the same traits?
To Not Be a Burden (1 Thess. 2:9–12)

**While** Paul was in Thessalonica, what other things did he do in addition to preaching the gospel, and why? *See 1 Thess. 2:9, 10.*

The idea that Paul was working “night and day” would be a huge exaggeration if taken literally. The Greek, however, expresses a qualitative idea rather than the actual amount of time spent. In other words, Paul was saying that he worked beyond the call of duty in order not to burden them; Paul did not want anything to stand in the way of his witness to them.

In addition, he was very careful to behave in such a way as not to cause offense, either before God or before others (*see 1 Thess. 2:10, Luke 2:52*). Paul and the apostles sought to be “blameless” in their relationships so that the gospel would become the central focus of attention.

**What** analogy did Paul use in 1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12 to describe his treatment of the Thessalonians? *See also Luke 11:11–13.* What does that analogy teach?

The good father provides boundaries and encouragement, as well as love. He adapts his nurture and discipline to the unique character and emotional condition of each child. Depending on the child and the situation, the father may offer encouragement, a stern lecture, or disciplinary punishment.

There is a certain tension in Paul’s missionary approach. On the one hand, he always sought to adapt his approach to the unique character and situation of the people; on the other, he was very concerned about authenticity, that the outward and inward be one and the same. How can one be authentic and genuine and yet be “all things to all people”?

The key is the love Paul had for his converts. He did all he could to model authenticity for them; yet, he realized that there were things that they were not ready to handle (*see also John 16:12*). So, he worked with his hands and adapted his instruction, all in order to avoid putting unnecessary barriers in the way of people’s acceptance of the gospel. A powerful lesson in self-sacrifice for sure.
Further Study: “No matter how high the profession, he whose heart is not filled with love for God and his fellow men is not a true disciple of Christ. . . . He might display great liberality; but should he, from some other motive than genuine love, bestow all his goods to feed the poor, the act would not commend him to the favor of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 318, 319.

“While Paul was careful to set before his converts the plain teaching of Scripture regarding the proper support of the work of God, . . . at various times during his ministry in the great centers of civilization, he wrought at a handicraft for his own maintenance. . . .

“It is at Thessalonica that we first read of Paul’s working with his hands in self-supporting labor while preaching the word [1 Thess. 2:6, 9; 2 Thess. 3:8, 9]. . . .

“But Paul did not regard as lost the time thus spent. . . . He gave his fellow workers instruction in spiritual things, and he also set an example of industry and thoroughness. He was a quick, skillful worker, diligent in business, ‘fervent in spirit, serving the Lord’ (Rom. 12:11).”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 234–236.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think about a painful time that you have endured (physically, spiritually, emotionally, or some mixture of them all). In practical terms, how does someone find joy or courage in the midst of such suffering? Why is finding that joy and courage so much easier said than done?

2. Think about someone whose life clearly did not reflect his or her claims to be a Christian. How did that person impact your own walk with the Lord?

3. What are the pitfalls in becoming emotionally attached to people with whom you are sharing the gospel? How does one set appropriate boundaries for the relationships that develop whenever you work closely with other people?

Summary: In this passage Paul opened his heart to reveal the truest motives for ministry. The ultimate motive is to please God, whether or not those to whom we minister are pleased. Motivations of money, sex, and power have no place in a heart determined to please God. The next most important motive for ministry is heartfelt love for the lost. Both of these motives are clearly expressed in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Remember that one’s witness for Christ is most effective when it is rooted in the motivation to please God and to love others.

**Feel:** Desire to care more genuinely about others and to please God in all that he or she does.

**Do:** Evaluate the motivating forces in his or her Christian experience.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Character Matters**

A. Consider the qualifications that Paul lists for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1–13. Why is character so important for the Christian life?

B. What motivations does the apostle Paul identify in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–6 as unbecoming for a Christian? What makes these motivations so damaging?

II. **Feel: Called to Integrity**

A. What “character scandals” have you witnessed in the church? What motivations led to these scandals? And what impact have they had on your church, your community, or on you specifically?

B. Role models are important. Unfortunately, many of the role models in society today undermine the things that God values most. Paul was a positive role model for the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:5, 6; 2:10). Who are role models for God today? What type of role model are you in your church, place of work, or family?

III. **Do: Evaluating Our Motives**

A. Cherishing the wrong motives can easily undermine character and harm the cause of Christ. What can we do in order to make sure our motives are pure?

B. Memorize Micah 6:8 and ask God to make it true in your life.

**Summary:** A genuine desire to please God and to love others is the only sufficient motivation for living a life that will truly be an effective witness for Christ.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The cause of Christ is best served when we are motivated by a desire to please God in all that we do, and we are willing to place the needs of others genuinely before our own.

Arguably the greatest threat the Christian church has faced in recent decades has not come from outside the church but from the ever-growing list of scandals that continue to rock the church from within. In fact, sadly enough, an Internet search of the phrase “church scandals” easily produces millions of results. While each scandal has a different name, face, and denomination attached to it, they all stem from one of three sinful motivations for ministry: the desire for money, power, or sex.

The damage of these scandals to the cause of Christ is staggering. We live in a generation in which the church has largely lost its moral authority. Instead of being a voice of restraint against moral depravity, skeptics are quick to point out that the church is often part of the problem. After each scandal, more people begin to wonder how the message of Christianity can be true if it does not appear to make a difference in the lives of those who proclaim it.

It would be easy to blame this problem on the clergy whose names highlight these scandals, but that does not really solve anything. Instead of blaming anyone, we need to realize that, except for the grace of God, any of us could fall to similar temptations—after all, we are all humans. The far better course of action is to heed the warning that the apostle Paul gave to the Thessalonians two thousand years ago about the dangers of letting our motivation for serving Him be overcome by any temptation to satisfy our own desires.

**Consider This:** What can we do to be part of the solution to the moral scandals that have plagued the church rather than be part of the scandal ourselves?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**I. Paul’s Motives** *(Review 1 Thessalonians 2:1–8 with the class.)*
In the same way that people today are often skeptical about television evangelists who seem more interested in money and fame than they are in helping the needy, people in the ancient world were also skeptical of traveling philosophers and public orators, and rightly so. For more often than not, the itinerant “preachers” of Paul’s time were nothing more than charlatans pursuing fame and fortune.

We get a fascinating picture of the type of religious con artists present in Paul’s day when we look at the life of a man named Alexander of Abonoteichus. According to Lucian of Samosata, Alexander was a charlatan par excellence. During the second century, Alexander founded a widely popular cult centered around a snake god called Glycon, who supposedly had a human head with blond hair. People from far and wide, including the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, came to hear (and pay for) the oracles of Glycon as interpreted by Alexander. In one year alone, Alexander received 80,000 drachma (a drachma was roughly the equivalent of a day’s pay). It was quite the racket. Lucian’s account and images of Glycon can be found by searching the Internet for the phrase “Lucian of Samosata: Alexander the False Prophet.”

To avoid being associated with religious frauds like Alexander, Paul makes a bold defense of his ministry in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12. His words make it clear that some people were suspicious, not only of his teachings but even of the motives behind his ministry. In response to such charges, Paul argues that his ministry was not based on error (2:3), impure motives (2:3), trickery (2:3), or greed (2:5)—the very things that certainly were associated with the cult of Glycon.

Aspects of three of the words Paul mentions are worth noting. First, Paul’s use of the word *impurity* probably has sexual connotations attached to it. It is used with this sense in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, and Paul often pairs it with sexual immorality elsewhere (see 2 Cor. 12:21, Gal. 5:19). This may suggest that some pagans viewed with suspicion Paul’s association with the prominent women in Thessalonica who converted to Christianity (Acts 17:4). Second, the word Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 2:3 for “deceive” (ESV) or “deceit” (NKJV) comes from a word that describes the bait used to catch a fish. It refers to any activity that seeks to take advantage of someone unaware. Last of all, while the word *greed* (2:5, ESV) has some reference to the desire for financial gain, it is actually a much broader term. It comes from the combination of two Greek words: the words *to have* and *more*. Thus, it points to the general human desire for self-indulgence in all phases of our lives.

**Consider This:** In an age of traveling charlatans, why was it so important for Paul to defend his true motives for ministry? What, if any, implications does this have for us today?
II. Paul’s Method (Review 1 Thessalonians 2:9–12 with the class.)

Anyone can claim that his or her motives are upright. Whether it is actually true or not is a separate issue altogether. Paul’s lifestyle and ministry, however, provided ample evidence of the veracity of his claims.

Unlike other traveling teachers who depended upon the financial support of their audience, Paul’s practice was to earn his own living by working with his hands. The reason for this practice was not that Paul felt ministers should not be paid for their services. In his other letters, he clearly states that they should receive financial support (1 Tim. 5:17, 18). But when it came to his own ministry, Paul chose not to ask for money so that no one might accuse him of simply seeking financial gain.

How, then, did Paul support himself in Thessalonica? Being a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3, 20:34), Paul would have earned his keep by spending his days cutting, tooling, and stitching leather in either his own shop or that of a fellow artisan. While leatherworking was not easy work, Paul’s “day job” did provide him with the opportunity to meet and talk with people who needed his services. His track record as an upright and honest businessman would have certainly also enhanced his credibility in the community. Finally, after a long day of physical labor and during the Sabbath hours, Paul would turn his attention to his other job, the one he liked best—the privilege of preaching and teaching the gospel to those who were interested.

Why did Paul do all this? He “did it because he intended the new Christians to know that he was there for them like a father for his children. Fathers don’t charge their children for bringing them up, for raising them to be the people they ought to be.

“That was what Paul’s work was about.”—Tom Wright, Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 98.

Consider This: Cynics often say that churches are interested only in money. What might we learn from Paul’s method of supporting his own ministry that would oppose such cynicism?

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. In contrast with the charge of being a religious charlatan, what two metaphors does Paul use to describe himself in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 and 11? What
The story of the prophet Balaam in the Old Testament (Numbers 22) and Simon the magician in the New Testament (Acts 8) contain the story of two men who lost sight of the real motivation for ministry. How did these men lose their way? What lessons can we learn from them?

Application Questions:

1. The stories of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon tell the experiences of two men who were faithful to God when many others were not. What can we learn from these men that will help us in our struggle against the temptations of sex, power, and money?

2. No one ever wakes up and decides on a whim to ruin his or her life. Every public scandal in the church began with someone taking small steps toward compromise and sin. What can we do to make sure we don’t go down that same path?

3. While the Bible records stories of people whose integrity never seemed to waver, it also tells of men and women who made grave mistakes but repented. Which of the latter stories offers you the most hope for your own experience, and why?

**STEP 4—Create**

*Activity:* End this week’s lesson study by reminding class members that no one is invincible. We all have our own trials and temptations. Even the most godly men and women we know struggle against sin—that is what the Bible teaches. We all need encouragement and prayer.

If possible, break the class up into small groups of two or three people for prayer. Encourage group members to share a specific prayer request. In addition, have each group pray for the spiritual leaders of their church, asking that God will keep them from losing sight of the high purpose of their calling and that He will help them to be of unwavering integrity.
Friends Forever
(1 Thess. 2:13–3:13)

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Thess. 2:13–3:13; Rom. 9:1–5; 11:1–12, 24–32; Matt. 24:9–22; 10:42.

Memory Text: “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones” (1 Thessalonians 3:13, NIV).

Key Thought: Paul continues to praise the Thessalonians for the good things he sees in them and to encourage them amid the persecution they are facing.

There is a deep, emotional bond between Paul and the Thessalonians. Paul stresses that bond as he seeks to continue reinforcing in their minds the love that he has for them. While certainly sincere, his words will also help prepare them for the criticism that will soon follow.

Paul begins and ends this section with a prayer. In a sense the entire passage is written with prayer in mind. The underlying theme of this focus on prayer is Paul’s desire for the Thessalonians to be “blameless and holy” (1 Thess. 3:13; see also 1 Thess. 2:19, 20) at the second coming of Jesus.

The friendship Paul has with them is deeper than earthly friendships; it is a friendship that goes beyond the boundaries of time and history on this earth. Paul is looking forward to spending eternity with the Thessalonian believers. This desire, in part, is what drives his intense concern throughout the letter about their beliefs and behavior. Paul loves these people and wants them to be ready for the return of Christ.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 11.
The Judean Example (1 Thess. 2:13–16)

On the surface, 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16 reads like a digression from the previous themes of pleasing God and caring for the new believers (1 Thess. 2:1–12). But verse 13 continues the theme of how the Thessalonians responded to the apostles and the gospel that they brought to Thessalonica.

With verse 14, Paul returns to the theme of imitation. The persecution in Thessalonica echoed the earlier persecution of Christians in Judea. Some Jews persecuted Jewish Christians in Judea, while Gentile and Jewish neighbors together persecuted the largely Gentile Christian population of Thessalonica. Here Paul shows that the persecution of Christians is tied to a larger pattern. Those who follow Christ are going to face opposition, even persecution.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16. What message should this passage have for us today? What does it definitely not teach?

Here Paul reveals his feelings about a specific group of Jews who dogged his evangelistic trail from place to place, sowing discord and opposition to the apostles. Passages in the Bible like this (see also Matt. 23:29–38) have been grossly perverted and twisted in order to “justify” persecution of Jewish people. But that kind of universal application goes way beyond Paul’s intention here. Paul was speaking specifically about the Judean authorities (the word translated as “Jews” in 1 Thessalonians 2:14 also can be translated as “Judeans”) who collaborated with the Romans in the death of Jesus and who made it their business to obstruct the preaching of the gospel wherever and whenever they could. In fact, Paul seems to be echoing what Jesus already said about those who were trying to kill Him (Matt. 23:29–36).

We must keep in mind that Paul himself was a Jew. He was not vilifying an entire class of people. Jesus was Jewish. The first disciples were Jewish. Jews alone formed the early core of the church. As far as Paul was concerned, every Jew he met, such as Silas, Barnabas, and Timothy, was potentially a friend for eternity (see Rom. 9:1–5; 11:1–12, 24–32).

Every person on earth is a soul “for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:15, 1 Cor. 8:11). Prejudice against whole classes of people is not appropriate among those who live at the foot of the cross.

It’s easy to point fingers at the church for failure in regard to how it has treated whole classes of people. What about ourselves? How much ethnic prejudice lingers in our own hearts?
Paul’s Hope and Joy (1 Thess. 2:17–20)

In the fourteen verses that run from 1 Thessalonians 2:17 through 3:10, Paul offers a chronological account of his separation from the Thessalonian believers. The theme of friendship runs throughout the passage. These Thessalonians are not just Paul’s parishioners; they are truly friends. The entire passage pulses with deep emotion.

Paul wants all of his later advice to, and criticism of, the church (in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5) to be read in light of his love and concern for them. And because of this love, he has earned the right to counsel the church there. The giving of advice is best received when it is grounded in love.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17–20. What is Paul saying here that’s so relevant to us today?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

The main verb of verse 17 (usually translated as “being taken” or “torn away”) is rooted in the concept of being orphaned. When Paul is forced to leave Thessalonica suddenly, he feels the loss of relationship as deeply as if his parents had just died. He wants very much to visit them because he misses them dearly. They are absent in person but not in heart. He blames this delay on Satan, his words here being another text in the Bible that shows the reality of the great controversy.

Paul’s longing for the Thessalonian believers, however, is rooted in more than just everyday relationship; it has an end-time focus. Paul looks forward to “showing them off” to Jesus after the Second Coming. They are the validation of his ministry for Christ, his eschatological joy and boast! Paul wants there to be evidence at the end that his life has made a difference in the lives of others.

What this passage should show us, too, is that we need to keep our priorities straight. Our existence here is but a “vapor” (James 4:14, NKJV); yet, it is vapor with eternal consequences. Paul’s focus, Paul’s priority, is on what is eternal, on what has lasting value and importance. After all, if you really think about the ultimate fate of this world, what else really matters other than the salvation of the lost?

How should all that we do in this life impact, to one degree or another, the salvation of the lost? However nice it is to talk about this ideal, how do we live in accordance with this objective?
Timothy’s Substitute Visit (1 Thess. 3:1–5)

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5 and Matthew 24:9–22. In what larger context does Paul see the sufferings of the Thessalonians and himself?

Paul is so distressed about his absence from the Thessalonians that he decides to forgo the companionship of Timothy in Athens in order to get firsthand news of the Thessalonians’ situation. His intense longing for them leads him to prefer being without Timothy rather than being without news of how they are faring.

Because Timothy’s mission is to be a substitute, or stand-in, for Paul, Paul does his best to boost Timothy’s authority with the church. Timothy is Paul’s “brother,” a “minister of God,” and a “coworker in the gospel.” Some Greek manuscripts go so far as to call Timothy a “coworker of God.” This would be extremely high praise. Paul knows that the mission will be a difficult one, and he does his best to open the way so that Timothy will be received as if Paul himself had come.

Verses 3 and 4 give us an idea of what Paul would have said to the Thessalonians had he been able to visit them. The specific word chosen to describe their sufferings is typical of end-time passages, such as in Matthew 24:9–22. Affliction should not come as a surprise. We all have been warned about it.

Christian suffering calls to mind the events of the end, during which time all true followers of Christ will face persecution (see Rev. 13:14–17). When suffering actually comes, we should see it as a fulfillment of prophecy and an encouragement rather than a discouragement. The purpose of prophecy is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future but to provide solid assurance amid the challenges we face every day.

In verse 5, Paul reveals that he has an additional motive for sending Timothy. He is worried that the difficult things the Thessalonians have experienced might have resulted in their loss of faith. He is worried that his mission to Thessalonica might somehow have been in vain or empty of results.

What are things we can do, day by day, to prepare ourselves spiritually for the inevitable trials that life brings us?
The Result of Timothy’s Visit (1 Thess. 3:6–10)

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6–8. Timothy was sent to encourage the Thessalonians. What aspects of Timothy’s report brought joy and encouragement to Paul? That is, what did Timothy see in the Thessalonians that Paul thought was so good?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

The “but now” of verse 6 is very emphatic. Paul did not waste any time before sitting down to write to the Thessalonians. The instant he got the news from Timothy, he immediately wrote 1 Thessalonians.

What do we learn about Paul’s prayer life from 1 Thessalonians 3:9, 10? What can we take from that for ourselves?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

The absence of words such as always and constantly (see 1 Thess. 1:2) suggests there was something new in Paul’s joy and thanksgiving here beyond the constant joy and thanksgiving that he always felt when he prayed for the Thessalonians. The joy and thanksgiving in 1 Thessalonians 3:9, 10 is in immediate reaction to Timothy’s news.

What was lacking in their faith (1 Thess. 3:10)? The immediate text doesn’t say. As we can see later, Paul’s concern for their faith was more practical than theological. Chapters 4 and 5 indicate that they needed to bring their practice in line with their belief. Though they had love and faith and were “standing firm in the Lord,” it becomes apparent later in the letter that they still had some important growth that needed to be done.

Why is prayer so important in our own walk with the Lord? How much time do you spend in prayer? What does your answer tell you about how important you deem it? In what ways can you strengthen your prayer life?
Paul’s Renewed Prayers (1 Thess. 3:11–13)

The second coming of Jesus is a powerful incentive for spiritual growth. Every act of abuse or oppression will be brought to justice. Every act of love or kindness will be recognized and rewarded (see, for example, Matt. 10:42). That means that every act in this life, no matter how small, has meaning in the ultimate scheme of things.

But equally important for Paul, and the emphasis in this week’s lesson, is that the Second Coming will be a glorious reunion of family and friends, whose relationships will last forever because of what Jesus has done. Christian relationships do not have an expiration date. They are designed to last forever.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13. What are the things that Paul includes in his prayers for the Thessalonians after the arrival of Timothy?

First Thessalonians 3:11–13 sounds almost like the benediction at the end of a worship service. Paul, of course, wishes to return to Thessalonica and make up the deficits in the church’s faith (1 Thess. 3:10). But even if he is not able to return, he can still plead with God to motivate and grow the Thessalonians into an abundance of love, not only for each other but also for their neighbors and everyone they meet. This love will be an important component of their characters when Jesus returns.

Somewhat puzzling is Paul’s comment in verse 13 that Jesus will come “with all his saints.” The words saints and holy ones are normally applied to human beings in the New Testament. On the other hand, Second Coming texts in the New Testament normally describe Jesus as accompanied by angels rather than human beings (Matt. 24:30, 31; Mark 8:38; 13:27). So, who are the “saints” in this verse?

The solution to this problem is to recognize that in verse 13 Paul adopted the language of Zechariah 14:5 and applied it to the second coming of Jesus. The “holy ones” in the Old Testament are best understood as angels (see also Deut. 33:2 and Dan. 7:10). The New Testament, on the other hand, gives the word saints new meaning: they are human beings whose righteousness is from Jesus. In 1 Thessalonians 3:13, however, Paul reverts to the Old Testament definition of the word saints as angelic beings who stand in the presence of God. As such, they will accompany the God-man Jesus when He returns to earth.
Further Study: “The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, during Paul’s sojourn in Corinth, had greatly cheered the apostle. They brought him ‘good tidings’ of the ‘faith and charity’ of those who had accepted the truth during the first visit of the gospel messengers to Thessalonica. Paul’s heart went out in tender sympathy toward these believers, who, in the midst of trial and adversity, had remained true to God.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 255.

“True, heaven-born love is not selfish and changeable. It is not dependent on human praise. The heart of him who receives the grace of God overflows with love for God and for those for whom Christ died. Self is not struggling for recognition. He does not love others because they love and please him, because they appreciate his merits, but because they are Christ’s purchased possession. If his motives, words, or actions are misunderstood or misrepresented, he takes no offense, but pursues the even tenor of his way. He is kind and thoughtful, humble in his opinion of himself, yet full of hope, always trusting in the mercy and love of God.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 101, 102.

Discussion Questions:

1. In Christ’s Object Lessons (today’s Further Study), and in many other places, Ellen White uses the phrase “souls for whom Christ died.” How widely should that phrase be applied? To every human being on earth? Or only to fellow believers in Christ? If Christ truly died for all, then why are not all saved?

2. How important is previous relationship when it comes to giving advice or criticism to a fellow believer? What can we learn about this from Paul’s example in this week’s passage? What can we learn from this that can help us in our ministry to others?

3. Paul’s love and concern for the believers in Thessalonica is very apparent. This love mirrors the love that Jesus revealed when He was here in the flesh. Love is such a powerful component in the softening of hearts and the opening up of people to the grace of God. How can we learn to love others more than we already do? How can we better learn to reveal that love, as well?

Summary: In 1 Thessalonians 2:13–3:13 Paul describes the events and emotions of the period between the time he was forced to leave Thessalonica and when Timothy arrives in Corinth with news about the church. The central emphasis of the chapter is Paul’s deep bond with the Thessalonian believers.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:13–3:13

The Student Will:

Know: Realize that genuine faith in Christ creates caring relationships among fellow believers that will last for eternity.

Feel: Experience the encouragement and support that comes from close spiritual relationships.

Do: Decide to be more intentional about investing time in the building of relationships with fellow believers.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Called to Community

A. God’s plan to redeem the world has always been accompanied by an invitation for those who want to follow Him to become part of His community of believers, whether that community be the family of Abraham, the nation of Israel, or the church. What does this indicate about the importance that God places on experiencing community with fellow believers?

B. The apostle Paul refers several times to the church as the “body of Christ” (Rom. 12:3–8, 1 Cor. 12:12–31, Eph. 4:1–16). What does this metaphor, or comparison, reveal about the kind of relationships that believers should experience together?

II. Feel: The Need for Community

A. What illustrations do you see in nature, our culture, or the world, in general, that indicate life is best when lived in relationship with others?

B. What are the blessings that come from unhindered community? Conversely, what problems do we experience when community is disrupted?

III. Do: Building Community

A. How strong are the relationships within your church? What could you do to strengthen these relationships?

Summary: For Christianity to live up to its God-given potential, it must be experienced in genuine, loving community with fellow believers.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Paul’s concern for the spiritual well-being of the believers in Thessalonica illustrates the bonds of fellowship and close friendship that unite the lives of God’s followers.

**Just for Teachers:** In this week’s lesson we consider the stories and metaphors in Scripture that highlight the importance that God places on the development of communities of faith, defined not only by communion with God but by close communion and friendship between God’s followers.

Between 1955 and 1965, an American psychologist named Harry Harlow conducted a series of social-isolation tests on baby monkeys for up to a year. The monkeys were separated from their mothers at birth and were prevented from developing any other relationships. The monkeys were divided into two groups. The first group experienced partial isolation by growing up in individual wire cages. The second group, however, experienced total isolation from any other living being. Then, at various periods of times, some of the test monkeys were introduced to other monkeys. The results of the test were shocking.

While no monkey died during isolation, every single monkey developed severe psychological problems due to lack of socialization. When the monkeys were introduced to society, they routinely experienced emotional shock characterized by behaviors such as self-clutching, rocking, and the inability to form normal social relationships. For some the shock was so overwhelming that they refused to eat and eventually died. The autopsy report listed the cause of death as emotional anorexia. Depending on the length of their isolation, some monkeys experienced a limited recovery, with one exception: the tests determined that twelve months of isolation virtually eliminated any chance of the monkeys recovering socially.—Harry F. Harlow et al., “Total Social Isolation in Monkeys,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 54, no. 1 (1965), pp. 90, 92, 94.

While the tests conducted by Dr. Harlow are certainly troubling, the results should not really be that surprising. The creation story makes it clear that God placed within all His creatures—whether humans, birds, or animals—a need for fellowship and community with one another.

**Consider This:** After creating Adam, God said it was not good for man
to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Why are relationships so important? Why was it not good for Adam to be alone?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

I. The Destroyer of Community *(Review 1 Thessalonians 2:17–20 with the class.)*

According to Luke, Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica came to an abrupt end when the accusations of a group of angry Jews prompted the city authorities to ban Paul from Thessalonica. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul refers to the same event, but he views it from a different perspective. The source of the problem that was hindering Paul’s return to Thessalonica was not a city ordinance or a group of infuriated Jews. No, according to Paul, the problem was due to the workings of Satan. He was the ultimate source behind all these events. While Paul refers to Satan only a few times in his letters, his reference here is important because it points to the presence of the great controversy that is being waged behind the scenes of earth’s history. In particular, we see here Satan’s efforts to hinder the community between God’s followers.

From the moment that humans were created, Satan has schemed and plotted to undermine God’s plan for His people to dwell together in unhindered community with Him and one another. He succeeded in the beginning by turning Adam and Eve against God and then against each other. And ever since that fatal day in Eden, Satan has sought to undermine God’s plan to restore those broken relationships. Because Satan knows that when God’s followers dwell together in unity there is a tremendous power for good, it should be no surprise that Satan works particularly hard at causing separation, division, alienation, and hostility between God’s people. Of course, Satan should not get all the blame for this. Since sin itself now infects the entire human race, we are far too often willing to further his malicious plans without his prompting.

**Consider This:** What stories in the Bible highlight Satan’s relentless attempt to undermine and destroy the relationships between the followers of God? In those stories, how is God’s grace revealed actively at work repairing and healing what is broken?

II. Paul’s Longing for Fellowship *(Review 1 Thessalonians 3:1–13 with the class.)*

Have you ever felt isolated and alone in a group of people you didn’t
really know or feel comfortable with, wishing that you had at least one close friend to keep you company? That is apparently how the apostle Paul felt in Athens after deciding to send Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the new converts. While it’s difficult to correlate all the events in Acts with those in 1 Thessalonians, it appears that when Timothy left for Thessalonica, Silas had not caught up with Paul yet. That reunion would not take place until Paul arrived in Corinth some time later (compare Acts 17:15, 18:5). This meant that Paul once again found himself alone in an idolatrous city, bereft of any Christian fellowship—a situation he did not particularly enjoy (Acts 17:16). As uncomfortable as it was for Paul, he was willing to make the sacrifice, longing to hear news about his friends in Thessalonica.

Paul had three things he wanted Timothy to do for him—three things that, incidentally, should be present in every Christian relationship. First, Paul wanted Timothy to “establish and exhort” (1 Thess. 3:2, ESV) the Thessalonians in their faith. The word for establish means “to make firm” or “to support.” The word exhort literally means to encourage someone by coming along beside him or her, to support him or her. Since Paul couldn’t travel to Thessalonica, he wanted Timothy to do what he desperately wanted to do himself. He wanted him to speak words of encouragement and support that would help the young believers hold on to their faith in Jesus during the difficult times they were facing. But even more than that, Paul also wanted Timothy to find out personal details about how they were doing. What had happened in his absence? How were they holding up? And how were they dealing with temptation? Strengthening, supporting, and caring about the life experiences of others: these are three of the basic building blocks of the relationships that God wants His followers to experience together.

**Consider This:** Strong encouraging relationships between believers are part of God’s plan to overcome the power of sin in this world and in our lives. What makes these kinds of relationships so powerful?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. What examples do we have in Scripture that illustrate the type of strong spiritual relationships God wants His people to experience?

2. What can we learn about the relationships that Paul experienced from the list of personal greetings and names of individuals in the last chapter of Romans? As you consider this list, make sure to note as much as you can about the gender, ethnicity, and occupation of each individual.
Based on Paul’s comments in 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13, what should be the ultimate goal of the relationships between believers?

Application Questions:

1. While Paul spent much of his life on the road, the lists of personal names scattered throughout his letters indicate that he had a close personal relationship with all kinds of people. How many people do you “really” know in your church? What could you do to get to know people better?

2. Paul’s comments in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 indicate that prayer for our friends is another essential element in the type of relationships God wants us to have with fellow believers. Who are you praying for in your church, and how has prayer increased your faith, as well as the faith and spiritual life of those for whom you pray?

3. What could you do in your church to help to encourage the development of strong Christian relationships between its members?

STEP 4—Create

Activity: Share with your class the following portion of the famous meditation written by the deeply religious English poet John Donne (1572–1631). After reading it, ask your class what it says about life, death, and community. Does the author go too far in what he claims, or is his perspective right on target? Discuss in light of this week’s lesson.

“The church is . . . universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that body which is my head too, and ingrafted into the body whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author, and is one volume. . . . No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were: any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.”—John Donne, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), pp. 107–109.
Lesson 7 *August 11–17

(page 56 of Standard Edition)

Living Holy Lives (1 Thess. 4:1–12)

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 1 Thess. 4:1–12; Matt. 25:34–46; Gen. 39:9; John 13:34, 35.

Memory Text: “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians 4:7, NIV).

Key Thought: Though human sexuality is a gift from God, as with all gifts, it can be abused.

The three opening chapters of 1 Thessalonians focus primarily on the past. In chapters 4 and 5, however, Paul turns to the future. There were things that were lacking in the faith of the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess. 3:10), and he wants to help them remedy these deficits. The letter would begin the process, but more could be done only after Paul and the Thessalonians could get together again.

Beginning with 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Paul builds on the friendship he had affirmed in the first three chapters and offers practical advice for the Thessalonians’ everyday life.

The main area of concern (but not the only one) in the verses for this week deals with sexual misconduct. Though we’re not told what specifically prompted his admonition, Paul speaks very clearly about the need to avoid sexual immorality. He’s very strong in his language here, saying that those who reject his instruction are, in fact, not rejecting him but the Lord. All one has to do, though, is look at the suffering that sexual misconduct has caused in so many lives to understand why the Lord would speak so strongly through Paul on this topic.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 18.*
Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13 and 4:1–18. How does the content of chapter 4 expand on various parts of the prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13? What is the relationship between Paul’s prayer and his inspired words to the Thessalonians?

Paul’s prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13 contains a number of key words that anticipate the content of 1 Thessalonians 4:1–18. The prayer is about “abounding” in “holiness” and mutual “love” in light of the second coming of Jesus. All these themes point to specific passages in chapter 4.

In our text for today (1 Thess. 4:1, 2) Paul picks up on the language of “abounding” in 1 Thessalonians 3:12, although the connection is masked by most modern translations. Modern translations have the commendable goal of making things more understandable in today’s language, but they may inadvertently hide connections that are explicit in the original. In the King James Version, the parallel between 1 Thessalonians 3:12 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1 is explicit; Paul invites the Thessalonians in both places to “abound more and more” in their love for each other and for everyone.

Paul began the work of building their Christian framework while he was with them, but now he is impressed by the Holy Spirit to fill in the gaps (1 Thess. 3:10) and clarify their understanding. The result would be “more and more” of what they were already attempting to do, which is to live a life worthy of their calling.

Paul begins chapter 4 with, “Finally, then” (NKJV). In chapters 4 and 5 he is building on the previous chapters, where his friendship with them is the basis for the practical counsel he will now give. They had made a good start. Now he wants them to continue growing in the truths that they had learned from him.

Two mentions of Jesus in this passage (1 Thess. 4:1, 15) are particularly interesting. They indicate that Paul was passing on the teaching of Jesus’ own words (which were later preserved in the four Gospels). Paul was offering more than just good advice. Jesus Himself commanded the behaviors that Paul was encouraging. Paul, as Christ’s servant, was sharing the truths He had learned from Christ.

Read again 1 Thessalonians 4:1. What does it mean to walk in a way that will “please God”? Does the Creator of the universe really care about how we behave? How can our actions actually “please God”? What are the implications of your answer?
God’s Will: Holiness (1 Thess. 4:3)

First Thessalonians 4:3–8 forms a complete unit of thought. The will of God for each Thessalonian believer is “holiness” or “sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7, ESV). What Paul means by holiness here is explained by the two following clauses. Each believer is expected to “avoid sexual immorality” and to “control his own body” (1 Thess. 4:3, 4, NIV). Paul concludes the unit of thought with three motivations to holy living (1 Thess. 4:6–8): (1) God is an avenger in these matters, (2) He has called us to holiness, and (3) He gives us the Spirit to help us. In today’s lesson and the next two, we will be looking at this passage in more detail.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and 7. How are the two verses linked? What is the basic message of both, and how is that message relevant for us today?

Verse 3 builds on verse 1, where Paul reminded the Thessalonians of how they were to “walk” (NKJV) — “live” in many translations — a Hebrew concept used to describe daily moral and ethical behavior. In verse 3 he uses another Hebrew concept to describe spiritual life and growth, “holiness” or “sanctification.”

A typical definition of holiness is “set apart for sacred use.” But Paul gives the term more specific meaning in this letter. Holiness is the condition the Thessalonians will be in at the return of Jesus (1 Thess. 3:13). But in chapter 4 Paul chooses a form of the concept that emphasizes process rather than outcome. It is a noun of action: “sanctifying” more than “sanctification.” It is the will of God that we be engaged in this process (1 Thess. 4:3).

Paul clearly does not endorse a law-free gospel. There are behavioral requirements for those who are in Christ. In verse 7, the opposite of “holiness” is “uncleanness” (NKJV) or “impurity” (ESV). As Paul goes on to explain in verse 3: “you should avoid sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3, NIV). The word for “sexual immorality” is porneia in the Greek, which would today cover everything from pornography to prostitution, to any sexual activity outside of marriage.

While salvation is by God’s grace through faith, the Christian life is to be a growing life, constantly striving for the perfection that has been promised us in Christ.

The gift of sexuality is powerful evidence of God’s love for us. Yet, this gift has been so abused that, for many, it has become a curse, a cause of great suffering and sorrow. What choices can we make that will help to protect us from the potential damage that abuse of this gift can bring?
Not Like the Gentiles (1 Thess. 4:4, 5)

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:4, 5. What message do you find in these verses? What do they say to you, personally?

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Although the moral philosophers discussed in lesson 3 attacked many forms of sexual excess, Gentile society as a whole had little or no sexual restraint in Paul’s day. According to the well-known pagan orator Cicero, “If there is anyone who thinks that youth should be forbidden affairs even with courtesans, he is doubtless eminently austere... but his view is contrary not only to the licence of this age but also to the customs and concessions of our ancestors. For when was this not a common practice? When was it blamed? When was it forbidden?”—Quoted in Abraham Malherbe, The Letters to the Thessalonians, The Anchor Bible, vol. 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 235, 236.

In today’s world many find sexual restraint of any kind distasteful. They feel that passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:4, 5 were relevant mainly in some other time and place. But the ancient world was no more sexually restrained than our world is today. Paul’s message would have been no more acceptable in the wider society then than it is now.

Paul’s solution to the problem of sexual excess is that every man should “possess his vessel” (1 Thess. 4:4). The word translated as “possess” normally means “acquire” in the Greek. The meaning of “acquire his vessel” is unclear. If by “vessel” Paul means “woman” (it was a common ancient expression for woman; see 1 Pet. 3:7), he is saying that every man should seek honorable marriage in order to avoid sexual promiscuity.

But most modern translations understand that the word vessel refers to the man’s own body. In that case the phrase “possess his vessel” should be interpreted as “control his own body” (NIV).

In either case, Paul clearly confronts the moral laxness of his own age. Christians are not to behave as the “Gentiles” do. The norm of the wider society is not to be the norm for us. Sex is holy, set apart for marriage between a man and a woman. As Paul goes on to point out in 1 Thessalonians 4:6, sex can never be a casual matter. When indulged in outside of the norms established by God, it is inevitably destructive. Who hasn’t seen in the lives of others, or in their own lives, just how destructive this gift can be when abused?
According to God’s Design (1 Thess. 4:6–8)

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:6–8. What is Paul saying about sexual immorality?

A man who had been sexually active outside of marriage said to a pastor: “As a young man, I learned to see sex and love as one and the same thing. When I got married, however, I discovered that premarital sex destroys not only your body (I got a venereal disease) but also your mind. Although we are now Christians, my wife and I have had to struggle with the mental and emotional behaviors I brought into our marriage from the past.”

The Bible’s restrictions are not there because God wants to prevent us from enjoying ourselves. Rather, the restrictions protect us from the physical and emotional damage that occurs as a result of sexual immorality. We restrain ourselves sexually because we care about the impact of our lives on others. Every person is a soul for whom Christ died; they are not to be sexually exploited, in any way. To do so is to sin not only against that person but to sin against God, as well (see Gen. 39:9). Sex is not only about how we treat others but how we treat Christ in the person of others (see also Matt. 25:34–46).

Sex, ultimately, bears upon our relationship with God. It is the Gentiles who do not know God who live lives of passionate lust (1 Thess. 4:5). It is ignorance of God that produces immoral behavior. Those who ignore the Bible’s teachings on this subject reject not only those teachings, but they also reject the call of God and even God Himself (1 Thess. 4:8).

On the other hand, when we follow God’s design, sex becomes a beautiful illustration of the self-sacrificing love that God poured out on us in Christ (see also John 13:34, 35). It is a gift of God and, enjoyed according to God’s will for us, it can powerfully reveal the kind of love that God has for humanity and the kind of closeness that He wants with His people.

We are told in 1 Thessalonians 4:7 to live a “holy life.” What is your understanding of what this means? Is this talking about more than just sexual conduct? If so, what else might it include?
Mind Your Own Business (1 Thess. 4:9–12)

**Read** 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12 and 3:11–13. What aspects of the earlier passage does Paul reaffirm in today’s text?

The Greeks had a number of words for “love,” two of which are found in the New Testament. *Eros* (not found in the New Testament) is the Greek word from which we get the word *erotic*. It refers to the sexual side of love. *Agape* is the form most used in the New Testament, as it refers to the self-sacrificing side of love. It is often used in relation to Christ’s love for us as manifested at the Cross.

Another Greek word for love, *philos*, is highlighted in our passage for today. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of what they already know about “brotherly love.” The Greek word behind brotherly love is the word from which the city of Philadelphia gets its name. In the Gentile world *philadelphias* referred to love for blood relations. But the church extended this meaning to include love for fellow believers, the Christian family of choice. This kind of familial love is taught by God and is a miracle of God’s grace whenever it happens.

**Read** 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12. In your own words, describe Paul’s admonition to the Thessalonians regarding business and employment in the urban context.

The Thessalonian church seemed to have a number of lazy and disruptive individuals. Enthusiasm for the second coming of Jesus may have led some members to quit their jobs and become dependent on Gentile neighbors. But being ready at all times to witness does not mean being disruptive, nosy, or lazy on the job or in the neighborhood. For some outsiders, the closest they will ever come to the church is the impression they take away from the behavior of known Christians in their everyday lives.

Paul’s solution to the Thessalonian problem was to encourage them to be ambitious (“aspire”), not for power or influence but to live a “quiet life” (4:11) that would involve minding one’s own business and working with one’s hands. In the ancient world, manual labor was the primary means of self-support. In today’s world Paul would probably say, “Support yourself and your family and save a little extra to help those in legitimate need.”

**How could we apply Paul’s words in these verses to our own lives, our own immediate context?**
Further Study: “Love is a pure and holy principle, but lustful passion will not admit of restraint and will not be dictated to or controlled by reason. It is blind to consequences; it will not reason from cause to effect.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 222.

“[Love] is pure and holy. But the passion of the natural heart is another thing altogether. While pure love will take God into all its plans, and will be in perfect harmony with the Spirit of God, passion will be headstrong, rash, unreasonable, defiant of all restraint, and will make the object of its choice an idol. In all the deportment of one who possesses true love, the grace of God will be shown.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 25, 1888.

“Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices, must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind must not be left to dwell at random upon every subject that the enemy of souls may suggest. The heart must be faithfully sentineled, or evils without will awaken evils within, and the soul will wander in darkness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 518.

Discussion Questions:

1. In *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 518 (see today’s Further Study), Ellen White talks about “guarding the avenues of the soul.” What are some practical ways that believers can do this? What implications does this principle have for our choices in entertainment and education?

2. In 1 Thessalonians Paul frequently uses the phrase “more and more” to describe growth in character and Christian behavior. What can churches do to encourage this kind of “more and more”?

3. If a young person asked you to give at least two practical reasons why he or she should “wait until marriage” before sex, what would you say, and why?

Summary: In the first 12 verses of chapter 4, Paul tackles a couple of the most difficult problems found in most churches, particularly urban churches. Sexuality is a very private matter; yet, there is abundant peril to the church when sexual immorality is not confronted. Equally important is the kind of church the world sees in the neighborhood and workplace. Paul’s guidelines in these matters are as important today as they were in his time.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Accept that God’s plan for his or her life includes a call to holiness in all aspects of life, including sexual activity.

**Feel:** Be convicted to let God take control of both the public and private parts of his or her life.

**Do:** Take the necessary steps to turn from evil and to allow God’s will to be done in his or her life.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Called to Holiness

- A There is hardly a letter written by the apostle Paul that does not include a warning against sexual immorality. What makes this particular sin worthy of such inspired attention?

- B Twice Paul tells the Thessalonian converts to lead lives that please God “more and more” (4:1, 10, NKJV). What does this repeated phrase tell us about the experience of the Thessalonians and the nature of the Christian life, in general?

II. Feel: True Love for Others

- A Paul warns against transgressing and wronging another person in regard to the issue of sexual immorality. What kinds of transgressions and wrongs does Paul have in mind? And how can we avoid committing them?

- B Why can’t sexual immorality and genuine love reside together?

III. Do: Abstain From Immorality

- A The call to abstain from sexual immorality is accompanied by the instruction to control the body in holiness and honor. What advice would you give to someone in order to help him or her control his or her body in holiness and honor?

**Summary:** In a world plagued by uncontrolled sexual lust and perversion, God desires that His followers lead holy lives that are sexually pure and edifying of others.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Christians should not be ruled by sexual passion but by the desire to please God, living a holy life marked by sexual restraint and purity.

Just for Teachers: The sensitive and personal nature of this week’s lesson will likely make many class members uneasy, including, perhaps, the teacher. While this may be the case, as Christians we can no longer afford to avoid the issue of sexual behavior simply because it makes us uncomfortable. God’s Word has much to say on this topic, and its counsel is desperately needed. Young and old, single and married, believer and unbeliever, all struggle with this issue. Do not miss the opportunity this lesson provides for the bringing of conviction, healing, and hope to those who struggle in this area.

Human sexuality is one of the most beautiful, powerful, and yet mysterious forces in the universe. It can bind a man and a woman together as one, creating a unique bond of intimacy and love that lasts a lifetime. In stark contrast, it can also produce a lifetime of pain and suffering, if it becomes the means of exploiting others in order to satisfy one’s own sexual passions. Unfortunately, more often than not, the pages of history are strewn with stories of men and women who have experienced the evil of the latter rather than the beauty of the former.

If sex is so beautiful and powerful when approached in the right way but so devastating when misused, where should people go for guidance and direction? Some turn to popular celebrities or talk-show personalities; others look in magazines, search the Internet, or seek advice from friends. Unfortunately, very few turn to the Bible or, at least, take its counsel seriously. According to a recent poll of undergraduate students at Yale University, 71 percent of respondents said their religious views did “not at all” affect their sexual behavior. Of the remaining students, 19 percent said their religious views affected their sexual behavior “a little,” and a mere 10 percent said religion influenced their sexual behavior “a lot.”—http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2010/feb/11/for-faithful-few-a-balancing-act/.

The results from the poll taken at Yale University suggest that many students have interpreted all the “rules” about sexual behavior in the Bible to mean that God is “against” sex and that He does not want us to enjoy it. Unfortunately, the church has, at times, helped to enforce this perception by characterizing sex as dirty and unholy. Nothing, however, could be further
from the truth. God created sex. The reason He has so many rules about it is that He places such a high value on it. He also knows that, because of sin, sex often becomes distorted and abused. God’s desire is for us to experience sex in its fullest and most beautiful sense, and that comes only when we embrace it in the manner in which He gave it to us in the beginning.

**Consider This:** What can Christian families and churches do to help young and older people alike see the value and importance of following God’s instructions in the Bible regarding sexual behavior?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**I. The Situation in Paul’s Day** *(Review 1 Thessalonians 4:1–3 with the class.)*

One of the particular challenges Paul faced as the apostle to the Gentiles was the problem of sexual immorality in the ancient world. As the lesson points out, sexual immorality is a translation of the Greek word *porneia*, referring to any deviant form of sexual behavior that is contrary to the will of God, including premarital sex, adultery, prostitution, pornography, et cetera. The Gentiles were hungry for the gospel; many of them struggled to distance themselves from sexual practices that were an accepted part of the daily culture that surrounded them. Consider the way in which F. F. Bruce summarizes the relationships available to a man in the pagan world:

“A man might have a mistress . . . *[hetaera]* who could provide him also with intellectual companionship; the institution of slavery made it easy for him to have a concubine . . . *[palace]*, while casual gratification was readily available from a harlot . . . *[porn]*. The function of his wife was to manage his household and to be the mother of his legitimate children and heirs.”—*Word Biblical Commentary, 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), vol. 45, p. 82.

It is within this context that Paul has to continually remind Gentile believers that while the world might not frown on such behavior, it was not pleasing to God. And it wasn’t that they should just not partake of it as much—Paul counsels them to “abstain” *(1 Thess. 4:3)* from it. The word for “abstain” that Paul uses means “to avoid all contact” with sexual immorality; “to stay away” from it completely. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul urges the believers to “flee sexual immorality” *(1 Cor. 6:18, NKJV)*. Paul does not want his point to be missed. Sexual sin is not to be played with. Once it grabs hold of a person, it is difficult to escape its deadly grip.
**Consider This:** How can Christians embrace God’s will to be sexually pure without being “puritanical”? How can we discourage the idea that sex is dirty or unholy?

---

**II. God’s Design for Sexual Behavior** *(Review 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12 with the class.)*

A wise parent knows that forbidding a type of behavior is not sufficient by itself. One also must provide positive instruction regarding what to do instead. Paul follows the same course. Instead of simply telling the new converts to stay far away from sexual immorality, he gives them positive instructions on how sexual desires should be fulfilled.

Instead of letting their passions carry them from one sexual encounter to another, Paul says that the proper context for sex is within marriage, and even there it must be exercised with self-control and “honor” *(1 Thess. 4:4, 5, NKJV).* As the lesson points out, verse 4 literally says that each of the Thessalonians are to “acquire his [own] vessel.” While this phrase is ambiguous, three factors indicate that it is best seen as a reference to marriage.

First, the word *vessel* is often used metaphorically in the New Testament in reference to human beings *(compare Acts 9:15, 2 Cor. 4:7, 1 Pet. 3:7).* Second, the Greek verb for “acquire” is also used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in reference to the process of acquiring a wife *(Ruth 4:10).* Finally, Paul says virtually the same thing, though in much clearer terms, to the Gentile believers in Corinth. After telling them to “flee sexual immorality,” Paul says, “Because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” *(1 Cor. 7:2, ESV).* This is not to say, obviously, that sex is the only reason to get married. Paul has much to say elsewhere about the importance of love within a marriage. His point here is simply that sex is to be reserved for marriage.

Paul’s final instruction is that, even within marriage, sexual behavior should be expressed in holiness and honor. A marriage license does not provide a spouse with the right to make sexual demands of his or her companion. Marriage is to be a sacred bond in which a man and a woman come together in sexual intimacy that glorifies God and edifies each other.

**Consider This:** A sexual-satisfaction survey discovered that the married couples surveyed experienced a much higher degree of sexual satisfaction (72 percent) than those surveyed who were engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage. What factors do you think lead to a higher sexual satisfaction within marriage instead of outside it?
STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. What stories in the Old Testament provide positive and/or negative illustrations of sexual behavior? What can we learn from these situations?

2. In what sense is the motive of pleasing God a better guiding principle than simply giving someone a list of rules to follow?

Application Questions:

1. The Bible’s warning against sexual immorality is very clear—abstain from such behavior. In light of this, what decisions do you need to make regarding relationships that you are involved in or things you may read or watch?

2. In what ways have you felt wronged sexually by others? How does it make you feel to know that, as Paul says, the “Lord is an avenger in all these things” (1 Thess. 4:6, ESV)?

3. Many of us have not acted with the degree of sexual purity and integrity that God desires of us. What hope can be found in the story of David’s horrible sin of adultery and in his song of repentance in Psalm 51?

STEP 4—Create

Activity: Share the following hypothetical situation with your class and use it as the basis for discussing the lesson:

A friend of yours argues that our society has too many puritanical hang-ups relating to sex and suggests that a lot of our problems would end if we would just start treating sex like any natural desire and make it comparable to drinking a glass of water. He says that if we took away all the religious taboos, stopped making people feel guilty, and allowed free sexual relations, everyone would be better off. What would you say in return?
Lesson 8
*August 18–24

The Dead in Christ
(1 Thess. 4:13–18)

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Acts 17:3; 1 Cor. 15:20–23, 51–58; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:4–6.

Memory Text: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Key Thought: Paul gives the Thessalonians (and us) a powerful hope for the future, the promise of the second coming of Christ.

In the passage for this week (1 Thess. 4:13–18) Paul is reacting to a theological misunderstanding among the Thessalonians. Though we are not entirely clear as to what the error was, some members were definitely in distress regarding the fate of believers who died before Jesus’ return. The issue seems to have been about the difference between those who died before that return and those who would be alive when it happens.

This week we will explore what we know about the situation that led Paul to write 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. In this passage Paul not only corrects first-century misunderstandings, but he provides solid ground on which twenty-first century Christians can stand. “For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets’” (Amos 3:7, ESV). And through the prophetic ministry of the apostle Paul, the Lord has revealed to us wonderful truths regarding the nature of the Second Coming. As we study these verses, prayerfully dwell on the incredible hope that’s contained in them for us.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 25.*
The Situation in Thessalonica

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. List the clues in this passage that point to the false beliefs in the Thessalonian church that brought unnecessary grief to those who held them.

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Within the Judaism of Paul’s day, a variety of views regarding the end time were prevalent. One of these viewpoints, in some form, crept into the Thessalonian church. Though we’re not certain exactly what it was, it seems to have been the idea that though all of God’s faithful would share in the “world to come,” only those who were alive at the end would be carried up into heaven. Those who died before the end would be resurrected and remain on earth.

In such a belief system, it would be a serious disadvantage to die before the end came. But it would also mean a separation between those taken to heaven and those left on earth. If the Thessalonians Paul was writing to lived until the end, they would truly ascend to heaven at the second coming of Jesus, but they would have to leave their deceased loved ones behind on earth (see 1 Thess. 4:13, 14).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Paul begins 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 with a comment about the church’s ignorance, rather than with “you know very well,” which appears elsewhere (1 Thess. 5:2, NIV; see also 4:2). Regarding the prophecy about the Second Coming, there were important things the church didn’t know and other things they would need to unlearn.

As we think about prophecy, we must remember that it is not given to satisfy our curiosity about the timing and details of end-time events. Prophecy has an ethical and moral purpose. God designed it to teach us how to live. It is intended to provide encouragement and purpose, especially in the midst of suffering and loss. Rightly understood, the prophecies of the Bible have life-changing power. In other words, while it’s important to believe like an Adventist (which means believing in Bible prophecy), it’s even more important to live like one.

What does it mean to “live like a Seventh-day Adventist”? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13, what was Paul’s purpose for writing verses 13–18? Why should this text mean so much for us today?

Why were the Thessalonian believers grieving as if they had no hope? A major factor was probably the short period that Paul was with them. We know that Paul talked about the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 17:3). There is also evidence that he talked about final events, even if his instruction was misunderstood. But he may not have had time to clarify issues related to the resurrection of believers.

A further element is the pagan background of most of the believers to whom Paul is writing (1 Thess. 1:9). Though the mystery religions of the time offered a picture of the afterlife, most pagans had no hope of life after death. A poignant example of this is found in a second-century letter: “Irene to Taonnophris and Philo good comfort. I am as sorry and weep over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things, whatsoever were fitting, I have done, and all mine, Epaphroditus and Thermuthion and Philion and Apollonius and Plantas. But, nevertheless, against such things one can do nothing. Therefore comfort ye one another. Fare ye well.”—Quoted in Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927), p. 176.

It is ironic that this letter to a mother who has lost her son ends with the same words as 1 Thessalonians 4:18, even if they have a radically different twist. Comfort one another, even though there is no hope. That is what she was saying. What a contrast to that which Paul expresses to the Thessalonians.

Paul’s purpose for the passage is outlined in contrasting phrases at the beginning and the end. Paul writes in order that they might not grieve as do those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). And he intends that the truth about the nature of the Second Coming will give them glorious reasons to comfort each other in times of loss (1 Thess. 4:18).

Someone once said, “In the long run, we’re all dead anyway.” From a totally human perspective, that’s right. From a biblical perspective, however, that view is very shortsighted. In the long run, what is the great hope we have in Jesus, and how can we learn to take comfort in that hope right now?
Dying and Rising (1 Thess. 4:14)

**Read** 1 Thessalonians 4:14. What hope does Paul offer regarding those who have died?

In verse 14 Paul offers the solution to the problem of hopeless grief. In the original language he describes the believers who have died as having “fallen asleep through Jesus.” While falling asleep is a common metaphor for death in New Testament times, the normal expression for a believer’s death is “fallen asleep in Jesus” or “in Christ.” A good example of this is the “dead in Christ” of verse 16.

A second issue with the text is the idea that God will “bring with him” those who have fallen asleep. Some read this phrase as meaning that those who have died in Christ (and, they presumed, went to heaven at death) will return with Jesus when He comes. But this interpretation contradicts Paul’s own teaching in verse 16, that the resurrection of dead believers occurs at the Second Coming, not before.

**How** does 1 Corinthians 15:20–23, 51–58 help us to understand the point in 1 Thessalonians 4:14?

We can know what he’s saying if we pay careful attention to Paul’s main point. He is drawing a parallel between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the death and resurrection of the believer. For Paul, the recent resurrection of Jesus from death was the guarantee that all believers would also be resurrected at the Second Coming (see also 1 Cor. 15:20–23). Paul’s theology is consistent. “If we believe” (1 Thess. 4:14) in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we should also believe in the resurrection of those who have died as true followers of Jesus.

So, Paul is using “through Jesus” in the same way as “in Christ” is used in verse 16. The point he was making to the Thessalonians was that their dead brothers and sisters would not remain on earth when the living believers ascend to heaven. All will ascend to heaven together (see also John 14:1–3). God does not “bring” the resurrected Christians down to earth when Jesus comes; instead (as He did with Jesus), He “brings” them up from the grave and, together with the living ones, to heaven. Just as the resurrection of Jesus preceded His ascension to heaven, so it will be with His faithful followers.
Rising in Christ (1 Thess. 4:15, 16)

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11, Paul builds on the earthly teachings of Jesus. There are more than a dozen parallels between these end-time passages and the sayings of Jesus recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But when Paul talks about the “word of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (NKJV), he is referring to a saying of Jesus that did not make it into the four Gospels but that Paul preserves for us (a clear example of this same thing is seen in Acts 20:35).


The second coming of Jesus is a noisy event. It is accompanied by a commanding shout from an archangel and the trumpet of God. Everyone will hear it and see it (see Rev. 1:7; Matt. 24:31; John 5:28, 29; Acts 1:9–11).

But the key point for Paul here is the order of events when Jesus comes. The Thessalonians had come to believe that dying before the return of Jesus would involve some sort of disadvantage in eternity, probably eternal physical separation from those who lived until Jesus’ return.

In this text Paul assures the Thessalonians that the living believers do not “precede,” or have any advantage over, the dead. The dead in Christ are the ones who rise first (see Rev. 20:4–6). That happens before the living ascend to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). The righteous dead are resurrected and given immortality along with those who are alive when He returns.

This passage does not teach that believers go to heaven when they die. If Paul had taught the Thessalonian believers that their dead loved ones were in heaven, why would they be grieving, and why didn’t he just tell them so? Instead, the comfort Paul offers here is the knowledge that the resurrection will reunite them with those they have loved.

Think about all that happens at the second coming of Christ: Jesus comes in the sky, everyone sees Him, the dead are brought to life, the living are given immortality, and all are taken together to heaven. In one sense, it’s so outrageous, so against all that common sense, experience, and even science teach us. Yet, this is what we have to believe; otherwise, we have no hope. If you can trust the Lord in something like this, how can you not trust Him with whatever “smaller” things with which you are struggling?
Comfort One Another (1 Thess. 4:13, 17, 18)

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 17, 18. What is the ultimate purpose of this passage about the second coming of Jesus?

As we said earlier, the purpose of prophecy is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future but to teach us how to live today. For Paul, the order of final events has practical implications for everyday Christian living. Prophecy is valuable to the degree that it impacts the way we relate to God and to each other. In this case, Paul wanted to use last-day events to bring comfort to those who had lost loved ones.


This text says that believers join Jesus in the air to be with Him forever. The key theme is the act of reuniting with each other and being together with Jesus. The text is silent regarding where they go after the initial encounter in the air. Paul himself clearly does not say that the believers will descend from heaven to earth with Jesus and reign there at the Second Coming. In fact, within the passage itself, the movement of the saints is only upward. The dead believers first rise up from their graves. Then they and the living believers ascend together to meet their Lord in the air.

Paul provides further information in 1 Corinthians 15:23, 24. There he draws a strong parallel between the experience of Jesus and of those “in Christ.” Jesus arose and ascended to heaven as a “first fruit,” which implies that those who are in Him will have a similar experience.

The immediate destination of the saints is clarified outside of Paul, in John 14:1–3. When Jesus comes, He will take His disciples to be where He is (heaven). He does not come to join them where they are (on earth). This is why Adventists believe that during the thousand years after Jesus’ return (Rev. 20:4–6), the righteous will be with Him in heaven, the wicked will be dead, and Satan will be confined to earth with no one to tempt or annoy. Only after all the events associated with the millennium do the faithful come back to the earth to dwell (2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 3:12).

Look at how “otherworldly” our ultimate hope is. How, though, could it be otherwise? After all, what real long-term hope does this world offer us? How can we learn, then, not to get so caught up in that which offers us no hope anyway?
Further Study: “Many interpret this passage [1 Thess. 4:14] to mean that the sleeping ones will be brought with Christ from heaven; but Paul meant that as Christ was raised from the dead, so God will call the sleeping saints from their graves and take them with Him to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 259.

“The Thessalonians had eagerly grasped the idea that Christ was coming to change the faithful who were alive, and to take them to Himself. They had carefully guarded the lives of their friends, lest they should die and lose the blessing which they looked forward to receiving at the coming of their Lord. But one after another their loved ones had been taken from them, and with anguish the Thessalonians had looked for the last time upon the faces of their dead, hardly daring to hope to meet them in a future life.

“As Paul’s epistle was opened and read, great joy and consolation was brought to the church by the words revealing the true state of the dead. Paul showed that those living when Christ should come would not go to meet their Lord in advance of those who had fallen asleep in Jesus.”—Page 258.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, discuss what it means to “live like an Adventist.” What is it about some of our distinctive beliefs that should be reflected in a distinctive lifestyle?

2. Think through the fall of humanity, the plan of salvation, and the promise of eternal life. What did Jesus do that gives us the hope, and promise, that death will not be forever? What reasons do we have for trusting in what He has done for us? How does the resurrection of Jesus Himself offer us great hope that we will be resurrected as well if we die before He returns? How can we draw comfort from the plan of salvation, especially when death seems so final, so complete, and so unforgiving?

3. Read aloud the passage for this week together as a class and then talk about what it means, how it makes you feel, and the hope and promise found in it.

Summary: In this week’s passage, Paul corrects a number of misunderstandings about the state of the dead and the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus. When Jesus returns, the dead in Christ rise first, then all believers ascend together to meet Jesus in the air. Believers can take great comfort in knowing that the separation from believing loved ones is only temporary.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Take comfort in the knowledge that, because of the resurrection of Jesus, death is only a temporary separation from loved ones who are believers.

**Feel:** Be encouraged that Jesus has provided a solution to the problem of death.

**Do:** Offer hope and encouragement to those who are grieving the loss of loved ones.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Death Is Not the End

- Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they did not need to grieve without hope for loved ones who had died, for they would rise from the dead when Jesus returned. Why is Jesus’ death and resurrection the basis of the Christian hope?

- Scripture teaches that when a person dies, he or she “sleeps” until Christ returns to the earth. What encouragement do you find in this metaphor for, or comparison to, death?

- List the order of events that will take place at the return of Jesus. To what aspect of that day do you most look forward?

II. Feel: Longing for the Resurrection

- Many Christians believe that humans are born with an immortal soul that goes immediately to heaven or to hell at death. Does that view offer “more” hope than the biblical teaching that the dead are not immortal and simply sleep in their graves until the resurrection? Explain.

- How have you found this passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 to be comforting on a personal level?

III. Do: Encourage One Another

- What can you do to encourage someone who has lost a loved one during the past year?

**Summary:** Death is not the final chapter in the life of a follower of God but only a temporary separation that will give way to a glorious reunion on resurrection morning.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Christians should encourage one another with the hope that the return of Jesus will bring an end to the separation caused by death and will mark the beginning of a glorious reunion of all the followers of Christ on resurrection morning.

Though the specter of death remains, exercise and a healthy lifestyle have made yesterday’s 50s today’s 40s. Medical procedures allow people to escape death for several more years. Prescription drugs can mask the symptoms of old age, and cosmetic surgery can even make us look years younger. But in spite of all our modern advances, death is still alive and at work.

And anyone who has lost a child or experienced the sudden and premature death of a loved one knows that death is still as tragic as ever. Death certainly is a tragedy in comparison to living for all eternity in a world free from sin and death!

If we want to understand fully the glorious hope that the return of Jesus offers, we need to see death for what it really is. The people living in Thessalonica in Paul’s day certainly did. While some people did live to an advanced age, most did not. The mortality rates of infants and children were extremely high, and many people who survived childhood died in their 20s and 30s. Things easily overcome today (such as poor nutrition, unsanitary living conditions, injuries, and certain diseases) were some of the leading causes of death back then. Life was hard, and death could strike at any moment, leaving tragic consequences and heartbreak in its wake.

**Opening Activity:** The frequency and unexpected nature of death in Paul’s world made the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead an event eagerly anticipated. What can we do, today, to help people to know that death does not have the final victory?

STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

I. The Difficulty of Grief and Its Place *(Review 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18 with the class.)*
Like children who are so eager to open a gift that they hardly look at the card accompanying it, we often give only a cursory glance at Paul’s comments about grief in verse 13 before jumping to the return of Jesus in verses 14–17. While the Second Coming is good news, we limit the hope it offers if we fail to spend time considering the problem of grief in verse 13.

Grief at the loss of a loved one is a difficult experience to go through, especially if that loss involves our own children. Whether a person is a believer with firm faith in God or an unbeliever, death leaves us all in profound emotional shock, wondering how life can go on when our own lives seem to be crumbling around us.

This difficulty of dealing with our emotions during a loss can be seen in the experience of Marcus Tullius Cicero, a famous Roman philosopher and statesman who lived roughly 100 years before Paul. About a month after the death of his 30-year-old daughter Tullio, Cicero wrote the following to a friend.

“I have isolated myself, in this lonely region, from all human conversation. In the morning I hide myself in the dense, impenetrable forest and don’t emerge until nightfall. Next to you, solitude is my best friend. My only form of communication now is through books, but even my reading is interrupted by fits of weeping. I resist as best I can these urges to cry, but I am not yet strong enough.”—Cicero, Letters to Atticus 12.15 as quoted in Jo-Ann Shelton, As the Romans Did, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 92.

It is important to note that Paul does not minimize the place of grief. While the return of Jesus offers believers a hope that unbelievers either have rejected or are in ignorance of, it does not eliminate the challenge that a believer faces when struggling to reconcile faith with his or her emotions. In times like these, pat answers are of no help (see the letter of condolence Cicero received from a friend at the end of this week’s notes). The only thing that can be done is to listen with a sympathetic ear and to offer encouraging words that focus on the promise that Jesus will one day soon make all things new.

**Consider This:** What encouragement and hope do the following Scripture passages offer to those who follow God? Heb. 4:15, 16; Isa. 53:3–6; 49:13; Matt. 5:4; 2 Cor. 1:3, 4; Ps. 119:50.

**II. The Day Jesus Returns** *(Review 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17 with the class.)*

Just as Jesus included familiar events in the stories He told so that
people could have a vivid picture of them in their minds, Paul does the same regarding the return of Jesus. One of the key words Paul uses in Greek for Jesus’ return is *parousia* (*1 Thess. 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23*). It literally means the “coming.” While it may not sound significant to us, the Thessalonians would have recognized it as the term used for an official visit of a royal dignitary or even the Roman emperor himself. Visits like these were not common, but when they did happen, they were accompanied by all kinds of pomp and circumstance and always resulted in financial gifts and privileges being bestowed upon the city and its inhabitants. Paul uses this imagery to give the Thessalonians a picture of the majesty of the return of Jesus.

Paul’s description of the *parousia* of Christ in *1 Thessalonians 4:14–17* is the fullest description of it in the New Testament. There is certainly nothing secret about it. It will be visible (*compare Matt. 24:27, 30, 31; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7*), and it will be audible—so loud, in fact, that it will wake the dead! Of course, it is not the loud noise that really wakes the dead. It is a divine command from Jesus that calls the dead to life.

Paul also assures the Thessalonians that the dead in Christ will not miss out on the *parousia*. The dead will be brought back to life, and those who are alive and remain will be “caught up” together from the earth to meet Jesus in the air. The words *caught up* (Greek *harpazo*) mean “to grab or seize suddenly, to snatch, or take away.” It indicates the suddenness and the irresistible force of the *parousia*. Our modern word *rapture* is derived from the Latin translation of *harpazo* in this verse. But it is important to note that there is nothing secret about this “rapture.”

**Consider This:** What can we do to encourage others with the good news of Jesus’ return?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. According to *1 Thessalonians 4:14–17*, what three sounds will mark the return of Christ and the gathering of His followers? What do you think is the significance of these sounds?

2. What additional details can we learn about the resurrection from Paul’s comments in *1 Corinthians 15:35–55*?
Application Questions:

1. With whom do you long to be reunited on resurrection morning? What will you do or say first when that reunion occurs?

2. How do unbelievers attempt to deal with their mortality? What symptoms in society do you see that indicate the lack of hope that many have in death?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Activity:** The following is a portion of a letter sent to Cicero from a close friend after the death of Cicero’s daughter (see section II of this lesson’s Bible Commentary). Worried about the extent of Cicero’s grief, the letter was an attempt to encourage Cicero to move on with his life. After sharing this letter with the class, have the class rewrite the letter from the perspective of a believer. What would be different?

“Even if she had not died at this time, she must nevertheless have died a few years from now because she was born a mortal. Take your mind and your thoughts away from these things and reflect instead on things which are worthy of the person that you are. Consider, for example, that she lived as long as it was necessary, that is, she lived while the republic lived. She saw you, her father, a praetor, then a consul, and an augur; she was married to men from noble families; she enjoyed almost all of life’s blessings. And she departed from life when the republic died. How, then, can you or she complain about fate on this account? . . .

“There is no grief which the passage of time does not lessen or soften; but it is unworthy of you to wait for the time to pass rather than anticipating this result with your own good sense.”—Cicero, *Correspondence With Friends* 4.5.1, 4–6 as quoted in Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 93.
Final Events
(1 Thess. 5:1–11)

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8, ESV).

Key Thought: The reality of Christ’s return calls us to continual readiness.

In this week’s passage, the Second Coming is still the primary theme, but the focus shifts. Here Paul is not so much clarifying details about Jesus’ return as he is proclaiming the need for constant readiness in light of that return (and the judgment that it entails). The previous passage was encouraging; when the end comes, the outcome will be much more positive than the Thessalonians were expecting. Now that they understand better the nature of His return, the question is how to prepare for it.

The issue in the church then seems to have been a theology of “peace and security” combined, perhaps, with some members calculating the time of the Second Advent. Through prophecy, the Thessalonians hoped to be able to predict when the final events were coming and, thereby, know when to get ready. As a result, some could have been living without any sense of urgency.

Who among us today can’t relate? The longer we are here, the easier it is to lose that sense of urgency. Hence our need to heed Paul’s words here.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 1.
The Two Sides of Judgment

Read Genesis 3:15–24. List the various ways in which God judged Adam and Eve both positively and negatively in this passage.

Though the specific word judgment does not occur in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, the passage is very much concerned with it. Paul wants the believers in Thessalonica to be aware that God’s judgment is not limited to something that happens in heaven at the end of time but that it has real consequences for their everyday lives.

Many people today are uncomfortable with the theme of judgment. They don’t like the implication of negativity and threat. But the biblical concept of judgment is broader than just threat, condemnation, and execution. There is also a positive side to judgment. Simple everyday actions of mercy and kindness do not go unnoticed or unrewarded (see Matt. 10:42, for example). God sees everything we do, whether positive or negative, and it all has meaning in the ultimate scheme of things.

The two-sided nature of judgment is evident in the earliest narratives of the Bible. In the Garden of Eden, God judges the sin of Adam and Eve negatively. There are consequences of sin in relation to childbirth, farming, and where they are allowed to live. At the same time, God judges them positively. He creates enmity between them and Satan and mercifully clothes them with skins so they will not suffer unduly in the changing environment. Even more important, those skins symbolized the righteousness of Christ that would cover their sin, as well.

In Genesis 4, God judges Cain negatively by sending him into exile. But Cain also receives a positive judgment. God places a mark on him so that no one will kill him. At the time of the Flood, God judges the human race negatively by way of the destruction of the Flood but also positively by providing the ark as a way of escape (Gen. 6–9:17).

In Genesis 11 God mixes up the languages and scatters the human race all over the earth (negative). Where is the positive judgment? It is found in Abraham’s call to be a blessing to “all peoples on earth” (Gen. 12:3, NIV), the same people who were scattered at Babel years before (Gen. 11:9).

How does the truth of Christ as our substitute in judgment make that judgment positive for us? Why must we always keep that important truth in mind when we think about judgment?
Sudden and Unexpected (1 Thess. 5:1–3)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3 and Acts 1:6, 7. What is the meaning of “the times and the seasons” (NKJV) in these texts?

“The day of the Lord” is a phrase found frequently in Old Testament judgment passages. It describes a decisive “end time” intervention by God, with a strong emphasis on the negative consequences of disobedience (Isa. 13:6–9, Jer. 46:10, Ezek. 30:2–12). In our passage for today, Paul combines this earlier concept with the thief analogy, which Jesus introduced (Matt. 24:43, Luke 12:39).

The threefold combination of the day of the Lord, a thief in the night, and contractions just before birth all illustrate the same point: The second coming of Jesus will be sudden, unexpected, and inescapable for the wicked. The end time is not the time to prepare for the end. The time for preparation is now.

Verse 4 makes it clear, however, that Paul is not scolding the Thessalonians. They already know that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. It is others, those who cry “peace and safety,” who will be surprised by the coming destruction.

In Acts 1:6, 7 the disciples of Jesus are asking Him about the timing of the final events of earth’s history. But Jesus does not satisfy their curiosity about these things. The timing of the end is not for them to know. We can see that the phrase “times or seasons” (NKJV) concerns attempts to calculate the timing of the end. Such attempts attract attention, but they are spiritually counterproductive. They cause either disappointment when the calculated time passes or delay in preparation when the anticipated time is too far ahead.


According to Luke 21:34, many people, through such things as alcohol and entertainment, try to escape from spiritual responsibility. Others may be concerned about spiritual preparation for the end but are distracted by the cares and anxieties of life. The suddenness of the end, however, means that the time is coming when there will be no escape for the distracted or the complacent. In the verses that follow Christ’s words in Luke 21:34–36, there is escape for those who watch.

How do we live with the sense of urgency, with the awareness of the nearness of Christ’s coming, and yet not get into fanaticism or extremism? How do we strike a right balance? Bring your answer to class.
The Believer’s Advantage (1 Thess. 5:4, 5)

In the opening verses of the fifth chapter, Paul addresses the condition of those who, for whatever reason, are not prepared. The Thessalonians already know that the reality of the Second Coming is certain; only the timing is unknown. The surprise will be tragic for those who are not ready. Some are unprepared because they don’t believe in the Second Coming; others because they think they can delay their preparation until events convince them that the end is near.

It was late in the 1950s. A young man heard a preacher say that Jesus was coming in 1964, thus the church better get ready. The young man decided that because it was still a number of years off, he wouldn’t bother readying himself until about, well, 1962. In other words, the preacher’s intention to increase the sense of urgency had the opposite effect on the young man. Such delay is perilous, of course, because you don’t know if you will live through even today. The good news is that we don’t need to know when Jesus is coming in order to be ready now.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4, 5. What is the spiritual meaning of metaphors such as light and day, darkness and light? What aspects of your life could be described as light or as darkness? Think through the implications of your answer.

In these verses Paul begins a series of contrasts with day/night and darkness/light (a ruin/rescue contrast is implied in verse 3). Unbelievers will be surprised by the events of the end, but believers will not be surprised. Why? Because they live in the light. The Bible is a “lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path” (Ps. 119:105, NKJV). Prophecy is given so that we can have enough information in order to be spiritually prepared for whatever lies ahead.

Preparation for the Second Coming involves investing serious time in the Word of God. Preparation is the act of laying up treasure in heaven. Preparation is about a daily surrender to the Lord.

There are many distractions in today’s world, from jobs to e-mail to entertainment to a cornucopia of drugs and other mood enhancers. Paul’s appeal comes down to us through the corridors of time. Set distractions aside. Put the Word of God first in your life, and you will not be overtaken by events, no matter how unexpected their timing may be.
Constant Watchfulness (1 Thess. 5:6–8)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:6–8. How does the drunken/sober analogy help us to better understand preparation for the second coming of Jesus?

Paul begins verse 6 with “therefore” or “so then,” depending on the translation. He has established that true followers of Jesus are children of the light and of the day. In today’s passage he continues the metaphor in order to exhort them to be more and more ready for Jesus’ return. While verse 7 offers a bit of a digression, verses 6 and 8 encourage the Thessalonians to be awake, sober, and armed for the challenges ahead.

Paul begins with the contrast of asleep/awake. Because believers “belong to the day” (ESV), they should not sleep, as the night is for sleeping. Paul is writing metaphorically, of course. Sleep here is a metaphor for spiritual laziness or lack of interest (in verse 10 it is a metaphor for death). The expression “let us not sleep” in the original means “don’t even start” sleeping. Paul assumes that they are already awake but encourages them to persevere in watchfulness more and more.

Paul then encourages them to be sober rather than drunk. In the ancient world soberness was a symbol for philosophical reason. Paul wants the Thessalonians to be thoughtful and careful in their reasoning from Scripture. Some use the Bible for date setting and speculation. Paul wants believers to be focused, instead, on the implications of Scripture for their own spiritual preparation. The sober/drunk metaphor may also point back to the kind of ethical restraint he has encouraged in 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12.

The daytime is associated with being awake and sober. It is at night that people sleep and, usually, at night that they get drunk. But in verse 8 Paul switches to the imagery of a military guard. Guards need to be awake and sober at all times, day and night. So, soldiers need to exceed the norm when it comes to watchfulness. Paul likewise expects Christians to exceed the norm when it comes to preparation for the Second Coming. And like soldiers, Christians should put on all of their equipment before taking their posts.

Take Paul’s words in these texts as if he were writing specifically and personally to you, and you alone. How would you translate those words into action? That is, what about your life would need to change in order for you to be doing what he says?
Encourage One Another (1 Thess. 5:9–11)

As we have seen, in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 Paul has drawn a series of contrasts to illustrate the two sides of judgment that will happen when Jesus returns. In our passage for today (1 Thess. 5:9–11), Paul addresses the contrast between wrath and salvation. Believers can have confidence in the last days because in Christ there is assurance that they are children of the light.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8–11. What is the essential message in these verses? What is the hope that Paul is talking about, and why can we claim it for ourselves? How is the gospel revealed in these texts?

Many today feel that the biblical concept of God’s wrath reflects more the culture of Bible times than the truth about God. That, however, is a misconception. It is true that, in the Bible, God has accommodated His truth to the limits of human language. But the concept of the wrath of God is not limited to the more ancient parts of the Bible; it is widespread in the New Testament as well, including from the lips of Jesus (Luke 21:23; see also John 3:36), the pen of Paul (Rom. 1:18, 1 Thess. 1:10), and the visions of Revelation (Rev. 6:16, 17; 15:1). So, we cannot safely ignore the concept; it must express something very important about God and the plan of salvation.

While we cannot go deeply into the matter here, we must be clear that the wrath of God is not an irrational, impulsive rage. God’s ways are not our ways (see Isa. 55:8, 9). The biblical concept of the wrath of God is more like a nation’s need for justice in relation to lawbreakers who abuse and oppress others. Those who persist in wickedness will be punished and destroyed. Because we have all broken the law of God, we would all be subject to the execution of justice were it not for the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

That is the good news about the wrath of God that shines through 1 Thessalonians 5:8–11. God’s purpose for us is not “wrath” or punitive justice but grace and salvation. And in Christ He has provided the protection we need so that we not experience destruction in the judgment. This is why Paul thought that the wrath of God, rightly understood, was a reason for encouragement rather than fear (1 Thess. 5:11). In Christ, we never need to face God’s wrath because, on the cross, Jesus faced it for us.

Talk about good news!
Further Study: “There is need of watchfulness. Our own hearts are deceitful; we are compassed with the weaknesses and frailties of humanity, and Satan is intent to destroy. We may be off our guard, but our adversary is never idle. Knowing his tireless vigilance, let us not sleep, as do others, but ‘watch and be sober.’”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 409.

“Some seem to feel that they must be on probation and must prove to the Lord that they are reformed before they can claim His blessing. But . . . Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are—sinful, helpless, dependent. We claim to be children of the light, not of the night nor of darkness; what right have we to be unbelieving?”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 3, p. 150.

“The mass of professed Christians . . . are living for the world. Their faith has but little restraining influence upon their pleasures; while they profess to be children of the light, they walk in darkness and are children of the night and of darkness.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 404.

“The world, who act as though there were no God, absorbed in selfish pursuits, will soon experience sudden destruction, and shall not escape. . . . Dancing and carousing, drinking and smoking, indulging their animal passions, they go as an ox to the slaughter.”—Ellen G. White, Evangelism, p. 26.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, ask the question, If Christ were to return tomorrow, would you be ready? Discuss the answers and the reasons given for them.

2. Go over your answers to the question at the end of Monday’s lesson. How do we keep a sense of urgency and at the same time function “normally” in society?

3. To what degree has the Adventist focus on the end of time been a positive or negative influence in your life? How have your views on the end time changed over the years? Why is an understanding of the plan of salvation, and justification by faith alone, so crucial to a clear understanding of last-day events?

Summary: In 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, Paul calls for total commitment to readiness for the second coming of Jesus. When we accept the gospel, we become children of the light. As we live out the gospel in faith, hope, and love, we grow more and more into the image of Jesus. If we are ready to die in Christ today, we will be ready if Jesus comes today.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Realize that the certainty of Christ’s return and the judgment should engender a sense of urgency and continual readiness in the life of a believer.
- **Feel:** Sense the need to live in light of Christ’s return and not become distracted by the world.
- **Do:** Resolve not to fall into a spiritual stupor.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Certainty of Christ’s Return

- A Paul’s use of the phrase “the times and the seasons” (5:1, NKJV) indicates that some Thessalonians were trying to calculate when Christ would return. Why is date setting not the best way in which to prepare for Christ’s return?
- B Paul compares the return of Christ to the arrival of a thief and to the contractions a woman feels before giving birth. What do these two metaphors suggest about the nature of Christ’s return?
- C The day of the Lord will be a day of judgment. In what ways should we relate to the concept of judgment?

II. Feel: A Desire to Be Ready

- A How would you describe the characteristics of a believer who is spiritually asleep? How about someone who is spiritually awake? How does your life compare?
- B What type of motivation does it take to help someone to stay awake spiritually? What are some of the forms of motivation that should be avoided? Why?

III. Do: Staying Awake

- A What are some of the practical ways that you can stay spiritually alert this week?

**Summary:** Believers need to guard against spiritual complacency as they eagerly await and prepare for the return of Jesus.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Believers should not lose sight of the certainty of Christ’s return and the need to maintain a sense of urgency and readiness in preparation for that day.

In 1970, a little known American evangelist named Hal Lindsey published a book on Bible prophecy entitled *The Late Great Planet Earth*. On the basis of a dispensational interpretation of Matthew 24:32–34, Lindsey claimed that Jesus would return in 1988, a generation after the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948. Coming on the heels of tumultuous events in the Middle East, the book quickly became a bestseller and has been selling ever since. In fact, the book has been reportedly translated into 54 languages, with sales surpassing 35 million copies! At the time of this writing, it is currently in its 25th printing—even though Jesus never returned in 1988!

Although the world didn’t end in 1988, Lindsey did not give up on date setting. He simply moved the date to 2007, claiming that Israel did not really possess all of the Promised Land until after the Six-Day War in 1967. And when Jesus did not return in 2007, Lindsey would still not accept defeat. He merely claimed that a generation was not 40 years but somewhere between 60 to 80 years. Thus, according to his revised calculations, the Second Coming should actually occur any time between the years 2027 and 2047.

While most people tend to disregard religious date setters as wacky, the popularity of Lindsey’s book, and others like it, illustrates the attraction humans have for the sensational and the danger of playing to that interest. Whether it is in religion, politics, sports, or even local news, we live in a society that likes to sensationalize things in order to get people’s attention. The problem with sensationalizing anything, of course, is that it ultimately results in sensationalizing nothing. Like the boy who cried wolf once too many times, it inevitably makes it nearly impossible for people to tell the important from the ordinary. And in issues of faith, it ultimately produces more skepticism and cynicism than faith.

**Consider This:** While Seventh-day Adventists have never officially predicted the time of Christ’s return, have some among us ever been guilty of sensationalism? If so, in what way?

---

109
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Judgment, Part 1: Paul’s Words of Comfort (Review 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 with the class.)

The new converts in Thessalonica were troubled by the return of Christ for two reasons: (1) they were worried about the fate of their friends who had died, and (2) they were concerned about the coming judgment. We have already seen how Paul’s announcement about the Resurrection in 4:13–18 provided the Thessalonians with comforting news that helped them to “encourage each other” (4:18, NIV) in relation to their first concern. Now in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 Paul addresses their concerns about the coming judgment with news that was also intended to help them to “encourage one another” (5:11) regarding the judgment.

Paul’s preaching had made a definite impression on the Thessalonians. While he had convinced them of the “living” and “true” God (1:9) and the importance of believing in His unique and only Son, Paul’s message about “the wrath to come” (1:10) on judgment day had started to worry them. Unable to share their fears with Paul, the Gentile converts concluded that the best way to deal with their fears about the judgment was to figure out “when” it was going to occur. Undoubtedly they thought that knowing the “times and the seasons” (5:1) would help them to know how long they had in order to prepare to face God’s judgment.

While this plan made sense to a group of newly baptized pagans, Paul pointed out that not only would their plan not work, but it was also entirely misguided. Paul explained this by first reminding them that it is pointless to try to calculate the date of the Second Coming because it will be unexpected and sudden like the arrival of a thief (1 Thess. 5:2; Matt. 24:43, 44; Luke 12:39, 40), and the labor pain that suddenly comes upon a woman at the end of her pregnancy (1 Thess. 5:3, Isa. 13:6–8, Jer. 4:31).

But even more important, Paul goes on to assure the Thessalonians that they have nothing to fear, because God is not out to “get them.” God destined them for salvation and not for wrath (1 Thess. 5:9). He was the one who took the initiative in saving them by sending Jesus to die for the sins of the world (John 3:16, Rom. 5:6–10). The judgment that occurs on the day of the Lord will be a positive judgment in favor of God’s people (Jer. 30:8, 9). The only ones who need fear that day are the enemies of God and of His people.

Consider This: The problem that the new converts in Thessalonica faced in relation to the judgment was a problem many Christians still struggle
with today: a lack of faith in God’s love for them. What can we do in order to help believers not “fear” the judgment, without promoting a false sense of confidence in our own righteousness apart from God?

II. The Judgment, Part 2: The Right Way to Prepare *(Review 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 with the class.)*

While Paul reassures the Thessalonians that they don’t need to fear the coming judgment, it is important to note that Paul does not dismiss the necessity of preparing for the day of the Lord. The problem was not that the Thessalonians wanted to prepare for the judgment; it was that their way of preparing for it was misdirected. What is the right way to be ready for the day of the Lord? Paul’s answer is twofold.

First, the Thessalonians should not buy into the world’s propaganda of “peace and safety.” The world is destined for destruction, and most people are oblivious to what the future really holds. While this is true regarding what is in store for the world when Jesus returns, it is certainly also true of the day and time in which we all live. Nothing in this world is secure. Everything is passing away.

Second, instead of letting the world lull them into a false sense of security, Paul encourages the believers to stay awake and live as though they believe the current world is coming to a close and that a new world is soon to come. He does this by calling them to be people of the light instead of the darkness *(vs. 5)*, to be watchful and alert rather than being sleepy *(vs. 6)*, to be sober instead of being drunk *(vss. 6–8)*, and to be armed instead of defenseless *(vs. 8).*

**Consider This:** What signs do we see in the world today that indicate all is not “peace and safety”? How can we live a life that reveals to the world the characteristics Paul advocated?

---

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Both Jesus and Paul use the analogy of a thief to describe the Second Coming. Why does this analogy not support the concept of a “secret rapture”?
“The day of the Lord” is a major theme in Scripture. Look up the following passages and describe the various events that occur on this “day.” Which passage do you find most significant, and why? Isa. 2:12; Isa. 13:6, 9; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Acts 2:20; 2 Pet. 3:10; 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6, 10; Phil. 2:16.

Examine the teachings of Jesus regarding the importance of not becoming spiritually complacent but of staying awake, as recorded in Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 21:34, 35; Mark 14:34, 37. What similarities in their teachings do Paul and Jesus share?

Application Questions:

1. How do you approach the doctrine of the judgment? Why do you think that many people overlook the positive aspects of it?

2. Paul ends his discussion of the judgment and the need to prepare for it with the words “therefore encourage one another” (1 Thess. 5:11, NIV). In what ways do you find Paul’s counsel in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 encouraging? And how might you share that encouragement with others?

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church sees itself as an end-time movement called to proclaim to the world the nearness of the second coming of Jesus. How can we seek to fulfill such a task without seeming sensational in the process?

STEP 4—Create

Activity:
1. Reread 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and take note of the characteristics that should describe God’s people as they prepare for the return of Jesus. Invite members during the week to look for practical illustrations of ways in which such a life should be lived. Invite class members to share their findings in the next week.

2. Hal Lindsey is certainly not the only person to have predicted the time of Christ’s return. Do a search on the Internet for the phrase “date setters end of world.” Based on what you find, how many dates have been set for the end of the world in the last 20 years? In light of so many failed predictions and the clear testimony of Jesus stating that no one knows the day or hour, why do you think that so many Christians continue to make such predictions?
Lesson 10 *September 1–7

(1 Thess. 5:12–28)

Church Life

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Thess. 5:12–28, Matt. 5:43–48, Gal. 5:22, Phil. 4:4, John 15:4–6.

Memory Text: “Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21, ESV).

Key Thought: Paul gives these Thessalonians, both leaders and lay members, very practical, as well as spiritual, advice about how to relate to one another.

Paul concludes his first letter to the Thessalonians with seventeen admonitions (1 Thess. 5:12–22) followed by a closing prayer (1 Thess. 5:23–27). This week’s lesson begins with three admonitions regarding the attitude of local church members toward their leaders (1 Thess. 5:12, 13). These admonitions are followed by six imperatives regarding how local church leaders should behave toward their people.

Eight brief admonitions follow in the next seven verses (1 Thess. 5:16–22). These can be organized into two groups; three counsels on maintaining a positive Christian attitude (1 Thess. 5:16–18) and five on how to relate to new light in the form of prophecies (1 Thess. 5:19–22).

In the concluding prayer Paul summarizes a main theme of this letter: that believers in Thessalonica and beyond would continue to grow in holiness until the Second Coming itself. In other words, they are to live every day in preparation for the Lord’s return. In one sense, what could be more of a “present truth” message than that?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 8.
Response to Ministry (1 Thess. 5:12, 13)

The two verses at the heart of today’s lesson follow the concluding admonition of last week’s lesson to “encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thess. 5:11, NIV). This work takes place in local churches, in the process of mentoring and discipleship. The lesson today focuses on how disciples should respond to the efforts of their leaders and mentors.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13. What is Paul’s basic point, and how should we apply it to ourselves? In what ways can you better work with, support, and love those who are “over you in the Lord”?

The structure of the Greek of verse 12 indicates that the three phrases in the second half all refer to the same group, the local leaders of the Thessalonian church. Paul calls on the members to “know” these leaders, meaning to notice, respect, or recognize them. The implication being that, perhaps, some in the church were disrespectful of authority.

The word admonish has the connotation of instruct, warn, or even “knock sense into.” Paul acknowledges here that church leaders will often need to exercise “tough love.” This kind of leadership is not always welcome; yet, Paul goes on in verse 13 to ask the members to highly esteem their leaders on account of the difficult issues with which they have to deal. Paul wants all the members of the church to be at peace with one another.

The language of these verses reflects ancient strategies for dealing with people. Thought leaders of Paul’s day knew that dealing with people is delicate work. They encouraged leaders to carefully diagnose the condition of their followers, to be sensitive as to whether or not the follower was open to correction, to choose the right timing, and to apply the appropriate remedy. Above all else, leaders were expected to examine themselves before trying to correct others. Paul added elements to this framework. For the Christian, God is the model of leadership, and the goal of church leadership is a membership who live lives worthy of God.

In some cultures, there is a tendency to distrust and challenge leadership; in others, to blindly submit to it. How has your own culture’s attitude toward authority impacted the church in your area?
Providing Ministry (1 Thess. 5:14, 15)

In verses 12 and 13 Paul addresses ways in which members in the church should treat their leaders. In today’s passage (1 Thess. 5:14, 15), Paul turns his attention to the leaders of the church and how they should treat those under their care.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14, 15. In what ways does Paul admonish church leaders in regard to their treatment of members? Look at the principles there. How can we apply them to ourselves, whatever our role may be in the church? Meanwhile, how should we apply these principles at work, at home, at play, and wherever we find ourselves? See also Matt. 5:43–48.

Paul encouraged the leaders in Thessalonica to “warn those who are unruly” (1 Thess. 5:14, NKJV). The unruly were members who refused to support themselves, who were willfully difficult to deal with, and who had to be confronted.

In contrast, Paul instructs the leaders to “encourage the timid, help the weak,” and “be patient with everyone” (1 Thess. 5:14, NIV). The “timid” are people who have little self-confidence or sense of worth. They are anxious and worried about many things. Such people matter to God; so, leadership should encourage them.

The “weak” are those with moral and spiritual limitations. They are gullible, easily discouraged by hardship, and fearful of the unfamiliar. Their hearts might be in the right place, but they lack knowledge and are troubled by the past. They need help to survive.

Paul directs church leaders to be patient with everyone. While the first three counsels in verse 14 are fine-tuned to meet various conditions, patience is always appropriate for pastoral care.

Paul probably continues to have leaders in mind in verse 15. Whenever caregivers are attacked by those who don’t appreciate their admonitions, they may be tempted to retaliate. But when leaders retaliate, it demonstrates that their leadership was not motivated by the spirit of Christ. It is crucial to sound church leadership to keep the good of others in mind.

Verses 12–15 presume that there will be mentors and disciples in the church, and it is important that there be a lot of respect and patience in those relationships. But we should not forget 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (“encourage one another and build one another up,” ESV). Pastoral care will often go both ways. There are times when the mentors need to be mentored.
Positive Christian Attitudes (1 Thess. 5:16–18)

According to 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15, Christians need to learn how to accept and how to offer constructive criticism. That can happen only in the context of relationship. The bottom line is that every Christian needs to be accountable to others and needs to be willing to hold others accountable. A praying church will grow in admonition and encouragement.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. What three things does Paul consider to be the will of God for every believer? Why is each one so important? See also Gal. 5:22, Phil 4:4.

Glenn Coon, a beloved Seventh-day Adventist preacher, loved to say that there are many more commands in the Bible to rejoice than there are to keep the Sabbath. Yet, we rarely give rejoicing the emphasis it deserves. Joy in life is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; see also Phil. 4:4). And spirit-filled joy is possible even in suffering (1 Thess. 1:6).

Paul certainly was a model of what it means to pray without ceasing. First Thessalonians is saturated in prayer, as we have seen. Here Paul invites readers of his letter to follow his example.

Thankfulness is another positive Christian attitude that Paul exhibited (1 Thess. 1:2, 2 Thess. 1:3). At the root of pagan depravity was a lack of gratitude to God (Rom. 1:21). According to Thomas Erskine, “In the New Testament, religion is grace and ethics is gratitude.”—Quoted in F. F. Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free (UK: The Paternoster Press, 1977), p. 19. It is interesting to note, then, that the Greek words for “rejoice” and “be thankful” have the same basic root. The key to godly rejoicing is a continuing spirit of thankfulness to God.

Open your eyes. The gifts of God are all around us; we just forget to thank Him for them—often because we’re so focused on the trials and struggles of living. If we would cultivate an attitude of thankfulness to God more and more, our walk with Him would be much closer and our lives filled with joy.

Make a list of ten things for which you are thankful. Be very specific. Then, make each of these the center of a short prayer to God. Notice the changes that will come in your whole attitude and outlook. This practice can show you just how crucial thankfulness is in our experience with God.
Relating to “New Light” (1 Thess. 5:19–22)

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:19–22, NKJV). What is Paul saying to us here? How can these words be applied in our experience? What “form of evil” must you, in your own situation, work extra hard to avoid?

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15 Paul was admonishing the church. In verses 19–22 he brings up another form of admonition, the gift of prophecy. The two negatives with which he begins this section are both continuous in emphasis: “Stop quenching the Spirit” and “stop despising prophesying” (1 Thess. 5:19, 20, author’s translation). He’s basically telling the Thessalonians to stop something that they were doing on a consistent basis.

Though we don’t know what specific issue Paul was addressing, he seems to be telling them to be open to more light, while at the same time he’s telling them to test it, just to make sure it is indeed light (2 Cor. 11:14).

There are various ways to undermine the gift of prophecy. One of these is to “quench the Spirit.” We do this when we ignore or resist the work of a true prophet. Look at all the opposition, even from within our own ranks, to the prophetic gift we have been given in the life and ministry of Ellen White.

A second way to undermine the gift of prophecy is to accept what is said but misinterpret or misapply it. We can approach a prophetic message with an open mind but apply what is said inappropriately to the immediate situation. This is something about which we, as Adventists, need to be very careful. We have been given a wonderful gift; we don’t want to undermine that gift by misusing it.

A third way to undermine the gift of prophecy is to give prophetic authority to persons or writings that have not received the gift from God. The church must be continually vigilant, testing everything in order to see whether the prophetic message builds up the church.

What has been the impact of Ellen White’s prophetic ministry in your own life? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24. What does it mean to be “sanctified wholly” and “preserved blameless” at the coming of the Lord? Shouldn’t we be that way, even now?

In today’s passage Paul returns to the language of prayer. His style is similar to that of 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13. His main theme is also similar: being found blameless in holiness at the Second Coming. Paul makes a transition here from what the Thessalonians are supposed to do (1 Thess. 5:12–22) to what God does in us (holiness) and for us (the Second Coming).

Believers have often disagreed as to exactly what this text says about the nature of human beings and the kind of character they can expect to have when Jesus comes. In our brief encounter with this passage, we will focus on what can be said clearly on the basis of this text.

Paul is saying that what God does in believers should extend throughout the entire person. Every part of the believer’s life is to be affected by sanctification as the return of Jesus approaches. In speaking of “spirit, soul and body,” Paul was not attempting to be scientific and precise about various layers of the human person (in biblical thought mind and body are a unified whole, not parts that exist separately). Rather, he was expressing that every part of our mind and body is to be submitted to God. God is to be allowed full control of our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Paul’s prayer extends from the present time to the Second Coming. Believers are to be preserved, or kept blameless, until the coming of the Lord. Paul is praying that the completeness of their dedication to God will be maintained all the way to the end. According to this letter, the Thessalonians were far from perfect, but what they did have was worth preserving until Jesus comes. As much as anything else, then, Paul was praying that they would continue to grow in grace through a relationship with Jesus (see also John 15:4–6).

In what ways can you, and should you, be preparing every day for the Lord’s return?
Further Study: “[As a child] Jesus carried into His labor cheerfulness and tact. It requires much patience and spirituality to bring Bible religion into the home life and into the workshop, to bear the strain of worldly business, and yet keep the eye single to the glory of God. This is where Christ was a helper. He was never so full of worldly care as to have no time or thought for heavenly things. Often He expressed the gladness of His heart by singing psalms and heavenly songs. Often the dwellers in Nazareth heard His voice raised in praise and thanksgiving to God. He held communion with heaven in song; and as His companions complained of weariness from labor, they were cheered by the sweet melody from His lips. His praise seemed to banish the evil angels, and, like incense, fill the place with fragrance. The minds of His hearers were carried away from their earthly exile, to the heavenly home.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 73.

“Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, go over your answers to Wednesday’s final question. Look at it in two ways: what has been Ellen White’s impact on our church as a whole, and how has her ministry impacted our lives as individuals?

2. Dwell more on this idea of how our culture’s attitude toward authority affects our attitude toward authority in the church. Does our culture incite us to disrespect authority or to pay too much deference to it? How can we strike the right balance?

3. How can your local church do a better job of mentoring new believers in character growth? What kind of spiritual leadership training is needed?

Summary: In this week’s passage (*1 Thess. 5:12–27*) Paul addresses a variety of issues, but he is particularly focused on the spiritual quality of local church life. Believers at the local level are to mentor each other and be joyful and thankful. They are also to be open to new truth, particularly prophetic truth, yet careful and thoughtful in their evaluation of new ideas. Above all else, Paul calls for complete submission to God in every area of personal life with an eye toward the return of Jesus.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Thessalonians 5:12–28

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Reflect on the importance of the role that leaders and lay members have in the lives and well-being of communities of faith.

**Feel:** Desire to make his or her church a place where leaders and members dwell together in harmony.

**Do:** Choose to be a positive and loving influence for the good.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Need of Good Leaders and Committed Followers

A The work of God has always prospered under the care of good spiritual leaders. What qualities does God wish to see in church leaders, and how should their responsibilities be carried out? *Compare 1 Tim. 3:1–7, Titus 1:6–9, and 1 Thess. 5:14.*

B What examples do you find among the judges and kings of Israel that illustrate the positive or negative influence that leaders can have on others?

C Jesus said, “‘No . . . house divided against itself will stand’” *(Matt. 12:25, ESV).* What can leaders and laity do to foster unity within the church?

II. Feel: Appreciative

A In what ways have you benefited from the admonition, encouragement, and help that has been manifested by the church? How did it make you feel?

III. Do: Live the Life

A Whether a leader or a follower, everyone has some kind of influence. How does your influence make your church a better place?

B What could you do to show your esteem and love for the work of local church leaders?

**Summary:** Leadership and laity within the church should carry out their respective duties with an attitude of respect and love for each other as they work together to advance the cause of God.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Life within the body of Christ should be grounded in complete submission to God and marked by the expression of mutual love, respect, and support between church leaders and laity.

One well-known leadership expert says that everything rises or falls on leadership. As shocking as it sounds, history bears witness to the truth of this claim. Whether we follow the stories of the kings of Israel in the Old Testament or the more recent history of business and world leaders today, leaders play a tremendous role in determining the success or failure of the people and events that they oversee.

To highlight the type of difference that a godly leader can make in the world or in the church today, reflect on the following qualities of a successful leader.

A successful leader is one who:

- Uses his or her power for good at the right time and in the right way;
- Is accountable for his or her mistakes;
- Is honest in not just the large but the small things as well;
- Motivates and inspires others;
- Leads by example;
- Puts others first;
- Overcomes adversity;
- Holds fast to integrity;
- Knows when to compromise without compromising principles;
- Puts service to others ahead of his or her advancement.—John C. Maxwell, Developing the Leader Within You (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1993), pp. ix, 201, 202.

Consider This: While these qualities of leadership are certainly inspiring, more often than not, they seem the exception rather than the rule. What would a person need to do in order to manifest and/or develop such leadership skills?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Importance and Duty of Church Leaders (Review 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15 with the class.)
It is helpful to remember that when Paul wrote these final instructions to the Thessalonians, the church in Thessalonica was only a few months old and was made up primarily of Gentile converts. This means that the leaders who had been appointed by the apostle would have had little time for formal training before they were suddenly (and certainly uncomfortably) thrust into the spotlight. While they did their best to fill the power vacuum left by Paul’s absence, it is understandable that not everyone would have been pleased with the new arrangements. It was one thing to listen to Paul but an entirely different matter to listen to leaders who were new Christians just like everyone else.

In light of the persecution faced by the Thessalonians after Paul’s departure, it is not hard to imagine that the church leaders made a few mistakes along the way and that some members probably didn’t take their authority too seriously. It is against this backdrop that Paul urges the Thessalonian converts “to respect” their leaders and to esteem them for the work they are doing (5:12, ESV).

In what kind of work were the leaders in Thessalonica engaged? Paul does not provide a lot of detail, but he provides a couple of helpful clues. First, Paul describes the local leaders as those who “labor among you” (vs. 12, ESV). The word translated as “labor” refers to the difficult kind of toil and exhausting struggle associated with manual labor. Given that the leaders in Thessalonica most likely worked full-time jobs in addition to their responsibilities for the church, they certainly would have been physically tired at the end of a day. But the far more difficult part of ministry is the spiritual, mental, and emotional exhaustion that comes from caring for the burdens, worries, and needs of others.

Another aspect of the work of the church leaders is the task of “admonition.” Admonition refers to the task of warning against bad behavior and the consequences that follow from such behavior. While the task of admonition is never easy, it is important to note that the word Paul uses does not entail the kind of harsh scolding that often leaves a person feeling belittled and bitter. The goal of admonition is not to wound but to heal.

While church leaders are responsible for the care of their local congregation, Paul makes it clear that the task of ministry is not to be the sole responsibility of church leaders. We all are called to look out for one another, whether that means admonishing the misguided, encouraging the despondent, or helping those who are spiritually weak (Rom. 14:1, 2; 1 Cor. 8:10, 11). And in all cases, it is important to remember to be patient (Rom. 15:1, 1 Cor. 13:4) with those to whom we are ministering.
**Consider This:** Paul states that ministry is a task that belongs to both clergy and laity alike. Why is it important not to make ministry the exclusive task of the clergy?

II. The Last Word (Review 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24 with the class.)

Paul's instructions to the leadership and laity make it clear that the type of life that God desires His people to experience doesn’t happen automatically once a person comes to Jesus. It takes personal determination to surrender our lives to God on a daily basis and a moment-by-moment decision to put the needs of others before our own. But that is not even enough. Paul makes it clear that we all need Christian teaching and leadership. Preparation for God’s kingdom is not a solitary enterprise; it also requires the loving care and support of a church family.

But now, after all the instructions that Paul has given about living a life that is pleasing to God (4:1), he reminds the Thessalonians that in the end it is God who is the only One able to produce such a change in our lives. We can’t make it happen. The power necessary to live a godly life resides in God and God alone (3:13). As long as we are willing, He will do that work in our lives.

**Consider This:** When talking about how to live the Christian life, sometimes people will use the expression, “Let go, and let God.” In what sense is that saying true, and in what sense is it misleading?

▶ **STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Paul assigns the responsibility of admonition to both church leadership and laity. What insight can we gain from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15–20 and from the situation that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 about how to deal with wrongdoing in the church?

2. Paul ends his letters with specific instructions relevant to the needs of each congregation. Compare Philippians 4:1–9 and Colossians 4:2–18 with 1 Thessalonians 5:12–22. What aspects of Paul’s counsel are the same? What do you think is the reason for the similar counsel?
Although the Thessalonians were experiencing persecution for their faith, Paul instructs them to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:18, ESV). What do you understand Paul to be saying? On what basis could they be thankful?

Application Questions:

1. How does one show respect and esteem for church leaders while dealing with disagreements? What about in the case of wrongdoing?

2. Paul says Christians should be patient and kind toward all. Do others perceive you as kind and patient? If not, what can you do that could change their perception?

3. What have you found most encouraging for your spiritual life from our study of 1 Thessalonians?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Humans learn best when they have a model or an example to follow. Use the following activity to help class members come up with concrete examples of the abstract leadership qualities highlighted in Step 1.

Activity: Divide the class into groups of no more than five people. Number each of the leadership qualities listed in Step 1, and give each person a copy of the list. Instruct the groups to write down the names of at least one person who positively illustrates each of the leadership qualities. After they have finished, have the groups share their lists.

Conclude by encouraging the class members to take their individual lists home and to place them on their refrigerators or in some other visible place. Encourage each of them to look at the list during the week and to seek to demonstrate each one of the leadership qualities during the upcoming week.
Promise to the Persecuted
(2 Thess. 1:1–12)

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Thess. 1:1–12, John 1:18, Rom. 2:5, 12:19, Rev. 16:4–7, 20:1–6, John 14:1–3.

Memory Text: “To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:11, ESV).

Key Thought: The second coming of Jesus is the culmination of all Christian hope.

Because written correspondence could be slow, a church that wanted to talk to Paul had to track him down and get a message to him, not always an easy process, to be sure. Once contact was finally made, the apostle would then dictate a response and have it hand-delivered back to the church. The process might take months. In the meantime false beliefs would have time to develop and spread.

This seems to have happened in Thessalonica, where new problems arose in the church. These problems may even have become worse due to the misapplication of what Paul wrote in the first letter. Second Thessalonians was Paul’s attempt to further correct the situation.

Paul’s words in this week’s lesson come down to this: at the Second Coming, believers will be rescued by God’s spectacular intervention in Christ. This passage provides further information about the nature of His return.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 15.
Fresh Greetings (2 Thess. 1:1, 2)

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:1, 2). What hope and promise are found even in such a simple greeting as this? How much theology is in there, how much hope, how much promise? How can we learn to make these hopes and promises our own?

Paul, as he does so often, talks about grace and peace. In one sense, are they not related? Shouldn’t the realization of God’s grace, the promise of forgiveness in Jesus, lead to peace in our lives? How crucial that, no matter our circumstances, we all take time to dwell on the wonderful provision of salvation made for us and the grace it offers us, regardless of our unworthiness. What better way to experience the peace that we are promised? We need to keep the focus off ourselves and on Jesus and what we have been given in Him.

**Compare** 1 Thessalonians 1:1 with 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2. There’s a small difference in the wording. What significance might be found in that difference?

There is one difference between 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul changes from “in God the Father” (1 Thess. 1:1) to “in God our Father” (2 Thess. 1:1). This adds a relational touch. There are people who feel close to Jesus yet are afraid of God the Father. Paul assures the Thessalonians that they can have as much confidence in their relationship with the Father as they do with Jesus. Jesus came to this earth to show us what the Father is like.

**Read** John 1:18 and 14:7–11. What assurance and hope can we draw from these texts, especially in light of 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2?
Paul’s Thanksgiving (2 Thess. 1:3, 4)

Paul had a tendency toward extra-long sentences. Second Thessalonians 1:3–10 is a single sentence focusing primarily on events surrounding the second coming of Jesus. The central core of the sentence, however, is not focused on the Second Coming (2 Thess 1:3, author’s translation): “We are obligated at all times to give thanks to God concerning you.” Paul’s comments regarding the return of Jesus (2 Thess. 1:6–10) are part of the reason that he thanks God concerning the Thessalonians themselves.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 4. What important spiritual principle do we find in these verses in regard to the question of faith? What happens to faith if it does not grow?

“We are bound,” or “we ought,” to give thanks to God is the main verb of 2 Thessalonians 1:3–10. Paul feels obligated to thank God for the Thessalonians because their faith is getting stronger and stronger. Meanwhile, their love for one another is also increasing, and both verbs are in the present tense in the original. This means that their growth in faith and love was consistent and ongoing. This kind of growth is basic to any healthy church. Like a plant, if a church does not grow spiritually, it will die.

Paul will go on to offer significant criticism of the church in the second and third chapters of this epistle. But he knows that people need a lot of affirmation before they can handle criticism constructively. He provides that kind of affirmation in the first chapter.

One of the reasons for Paul’s affirmations is that the church in Thessalonica is continuing to suffer persecution. He particularly commends their “patience” in affliction. Instead of faith, hope, and love, Paul talks about their faith, love, and patience. Because “patience” here is substituted for “hope,” it leads Paul into his exposition of the Second Coming later in the chapter.

The result of their increase in faith and love is that their fortitude in the face of affliction has become a source of boasting for the apostles among all the churches they visit. The Thessalonians have become a model of Christian commitment under fire.

How can trials and affliction increase our faith? At the same time, who hasn’t struggled to maintain faith precisely because of trials?
Suffering as a Sign of the End
(2 Thess. 1:5, 6)

Second Thessalonians 1:5–10 in the Greek has an Old Testament feel (the Bible of most New Testament Christians was the Septuagint, a pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament). Second Thessalonians exhibits many more references to the Old Testament than does 1 Thessalonians.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 6. What is Paul saying?

The word evidence (NIV) or token (KJV) means “proof” or “plain indication” of something. What does the persecution of Christians (vs. 4) prove? It is certainly not evidence of God’s judgment against His people. To the contrary, it is a pointer to the future judgment, in which the people of God are vindicated and those who persecuted them receive the same kind of experience they inflicted on others.

There is a message here for us. Violence begets violence, and those who use violence against others have reason to fear for the future. God’s judgment sets things right. Those who persecute the people of God will one day face the justice of God. But those who experience injustice on account of their faith today can look with confidence to God’s future judgment. On that day, it will be evident to all that they were the objects of God’s favor.

The New Testament encourages believers to exhibit grace, mercy, and forgiveness toward others. But when these actions are rebuffed and repaid with curses, blows, and confinement, it is encouraging to know that injustice will not last forever. Thus, the saints of God are invited to have patience (see also Rev. 14:12).

In 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 6, therefore, Paul reminds the persecuted Thessalonians that the “righteous judgment of God” in the future will demonstrate His approval of them in the present. More than this, their patience and faith in the face of trial validates that God has chosen them. In this way Christian suffering can be the basis for rejoicing (1 Thess. 1:6, 7). It is real-life evidence of whose side we will be on when Jesus comes.

Verse 5 shows the righteous judgment of God in His approval of the Thessalonians. Verse 6 shows it in the condemnation and destruction of their persecutors.

Have you been unfairly victimized, with the perpetrators receiving no apparent punishment for their actions? If so, what comfort can you take in the promises of God’s judgment? Or look at it this way: have you treated people badly, unfairly, and have gotten away with it (at least so far)? If so, how do you view the promises of God’s end-time judgment?
Fire and Destruction (2 Thess. 1:7–9)

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9. What is the primary reason for the destruction of the wicked at the time of Jesus’ second coming? How are we to understand these verses with the idea of God as being full of love, grace, and forgiveness?

Many people are uncomfortable with the language of these verses. They feel that “pay back” (NIV), vengeance, punishment, and the infliction of suffering are unworthy of a God of love, grace, and mercy. But just punishment and retribution is a frequent theme of Paul’s (Rom. 2:5, 12:19). Paul is unequivocal: God’s justice will one day be powerfully made manifest.

And why not? Any good government in today’s world must at some point exercise force in order to restrain evil. Though force is not always violent (as when you are stopped for a traffic violation or audited for your taxes), in some cases, especially when the criminals are using violence themselves, they must be answered with violence. Good governments provide a necessary restraint so that we can all live together in peace. Many times outright evil will not give way voluntarily. And the greater the power and brutality of evil, the greater the force often needed to undo that evil.

The images in this passage are not pretty, but they assure us that God will do whatever it takes to end violence and oppression.

Read Revelation 16:4–7 and Daniel 7:21, 22. What do these verses teach that parallels what Paul wrote above in 2 Thessalonians?

Through His own experience, Jesus understands the cost of suffering. He can be trusted to exercise divine justice but without overkill. Divine justice will result in suffering, but not one iota more than necessary. If we can trust God in anything, we can trust that His justice will reveal a wisdom and fairness that we cannot currently comprehend.

The goal of this passage is not to rejoice in vengeance but to encourage the abused and oppressed. The day of justice is coming. We don’t need to take justice into our own hands.
Glorifying Christ (2 Thess. 1:10–12)

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:10–12. What does it mean that Jesus Christ will be glorified in His saints?

The full sentence in this week’s text (2 Thess. 1:3–10) provides a number of important details about the second coming of Jesus. When Jesus returns, He will afflict the afflicters and provide rest for the afflicted (see 2 Thess. 1:6, 7). He will come down from heaven in the company of powerful angels (2 Thess. 1:7). He will come with flaming fire and execute justice on those who have rejected God and the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:8). The wicked are destroyed (2 Thess. 1:8, 9) while the righteous bring glory to Christ (2 Thess. 1:10).

The events of the Second Coming set the stage for the millennium, during which time the earth lies desolate for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–6). Though this week’s passage does not tell us what happens to the righteous, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 tells us that the saved join Jesus in the air at His return. John 14:1–3 further indicates that Jesus will take the righteous with Him to heaven.

How does Paul instruct believers to prepare for the second coming of Jesus? 2 Thess. 1:11.

With verse 10 Paul is finished talking about the wicked and turns again to the fate of the righteous at the Second Coming. In verses 10–12, the glory of Jesus is exhibited in the character of those who believe in Him. Paul rejoices that his prayers and efforts for the Thessalonians will be vindicated at the return of Jesus (see 1 Thess. 2:19, 20).

Paul here sets the stage for chapter 2, in which he argues that the day of the Lord has not yet come. If it had, there would be flaming fire, destruction of the wicked, and the full glorification of Jesus in the eyes of all.

In today’s passage, Paul shifts easily from God to Jesus, using the two names interchangeably. According to inspiration, Jesus is God. This teaching is very important to us. The greater Jesus is, the more powerful His salvation and the clearer a picture of God we receive as we contemplate His life, death, resurrection, and return. If Jesus is truly God, then the Father is just like Him.

How can we learn to go about the business of living our daily lives, but with the expectation of the Second Coming? Why is it so easy, amid the daily rhythms of life, to forget about His coming? How can we learn to keep this amazing promise before us and go about our daily business, while still giving the promise the time, attention, and seriousness it deserves?
**Further Study:** “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. . . .

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.

“The instruction that Paul sent the Thessalonians in his first epistle regarding the second coming of Christ, was in perfect harmony with his former teaching. Yet his words were misapprehended by some of the Thessalonian brethren. . . .


**Discussion Questions:**

1. Does the truth of Scripture reveal itself more through intensive word-by-word study or in the broad themes that we can observe by way of wide reading? Or is there a time and place for both? Discuss the answer(s) in class.

2. Read the Ellen G. White quote in today’s Further Study regarding how inspiration works. How does this help us to understand the “human element” that appears at times in the Bible?

3. Does the thought of the Second Coming frighten you, or does it bring you hope? What does your answer say about your relationship with God or about your understanding of the gospel? Or both?

4. However much truth there is to the idea that trials can strengthen our faith and character, what do you say to people whose trials are not only causing them to be bitter, resentful, and angry (in other words, not character-building) but are causing them to lose their faith?

**Summary:** In the opening chapter of 2 Thessalonians, Paul rejoices over the way in which the Thessalonian believers remain faithful in spite of much affliction. He encourages them by pointing to the great reversal at the second coming of Jesus. Whatever happens now, we have the promise that God will execute divine justice.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

The Student Will:

Know: Explain how belief in God’s divine justice at the Second Coming can encourage His followers to have patience and steadfastness of faith during earthly trials and tribulation.

Feel: Be confident that God will right all wrongs when Jesus returns.

Do: Trust that God is his or her Defender and that He will repay all wrongs performed against him or her.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God Will Right All Wrongs

A. The most difficult part of suffering is the feeling that God has deserted us. What passages or stories in the Bible illustrate that God is with us during our trials and will repay those who have wronged us?

B. The penalty that the wicked receive is described as “eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord” (vs. 9, ESV). How does this penalty, and the fact that God is just in giving it, argue against the view that the punishment of the wicked consists of unending conscious torment?

II. Feel: Strengthened in Trial

A. God has promised, “‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5, ESV). How has this and other Scripture promises encouraged you during difficult times?

B. How does knowing that God will vindicate His followers make it easier to endure adversity?

III. Do: Practicing Patience

A. Because trials are an inevitable part of life, what can we do during the easier times in life to prepare for the difficult times that will come?

Summary: God is aware of the injustices inflicted on His followers and will vindicate their faithfulness and punish their enemies when Christ returns.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The certainty of Christ’s return in order to rescue His followers and punish the wicked has been a source of encouragement and hope for Christians during difficult times throughout all ages of earth’s history.

Down through the ages, Christians have faced trials and persecutions as a result of their faith in Christ. The stories of what some early Christians were willing to endure are inspiring. One example of this involves persecution that erupted against Christians living in the towns of Vienne and Lyons in A.D. 177. A Christian who managed to escape reported that a young girl named Blandina was so severely tortured for hours that her body looked like a mangled, gaping wound. Yet, in response to the brutality, she would not surrender her faith. She would only say, “‘I am a Christian; we do nothing to be ashamed of.’”—Eusebius: *The History of the Church From Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 141.

How did Christians endure such savagery? The answer can be seen in what a Christian bishop named Polycarp said before he was martyred in A.D. 155. Although he was 86 years old, Polycarp was arrested for his faith and brought before the Roman governor. Due to Polycarp’s age, the governor pleaded with him to surrender his faith and escape punishment. After multiple appeals to revile Christ, Polycarp said, “‘For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?’” When the governor threatened to burn Polycarp at the stake, Polycarp replied, “‘You threaten with a fire that burns only briefly and after just a little while is extinguished, for you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Come, do what you wish.’”—Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), p. 235.

Early Christians, such as Polycarp, were sustained in persecution because their faith was rooted in a deep appreciation of God’s love and the realization that this world will soon pass away when Christ returns to award the faithful and punish the wicked (even if some didn’t understand the nature of the final punishment).

**Consider This:** As Christians we often get so caught up in our own lives that we forget what God has done for us and what this world is really all about. How can we keep the big picture in view as we live?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Greetings and Thanksgivings *(Review 2 Thessalonians 1:1–5 with the class.)*

Whether it is a gift that we receive or something new that we purchase ourselves, once we experience the things of this world, our excitement for them usually fades quickly, and we are ready to move on to something new. While that is true of most things in our world, Paul’s greeting in his second letter to the Thessalonians should remind us that it is not true when it comes to experiencing God’s “grace and peace.” Instead of immediately jumping into the pressing issues he needs to deal with in his letter, Paul first pauses to remind his readers, as he does in all his letters, of God’s offer of grace. It is a subject of which Paul never tires. It changed his life and also transformed the hearts and lives of the believers in Thessalonica.

Paul’s emphasis on his obligation to thank God on behalf of the Thessalonians may suggest that the new converts felt a little abashed about the way in which Paul had gone on and on about them in his previous letter and in front of others. Paul reminds them, however, that such thankfulness is not only required of the Christian *(1 Thess. 5:18)* but that the Thessalonians deserved it. God had not only produced a miraculous change in their lives, but evidence of His work in their lives continued to be manifest in how their faith, love, and steadfast hope in God were increasing. That was something worthy of boasting about, especially because all this was happening in the midst of trials and persecution.

But how could Paul see evidence of the righteous judgment of God in the lives of the Thessalonians when they were undergoing persecution? In the ancient world, people’s tendency was to see tribulation as an indication of God’s disfavor (remember Job’s friends?). The evidence of God’s righteous judgment has two aspects to it. First, to some extent, the evidence Paul saw was the steadfastness of faith that the Thessalonians displayed during their trials. Such resilience was certainly evidence that God was at work in their lives. But more than this, Paul also saw the persecution that they faced as evidence of God’s righteous judgment. How was this the case? As Paul said before, Christians should expect persecution. If the presence of the risen Christ in our lives is truly a foretaste of God’s kingdom that will ultimately supplant the kingdoms of this world *(Dan. 2:44, 45)*, then it should be no surprise that this world will feel threatened and seek to hinder God’s work and His followers. The persecution that the
Thessalonians were facing for their faith, and the persecution that His followers continue to face, is evidence that a new day is coming.

**Consider This:** According to Paul, persecution is evidence of the “righteous judgment of God” in our lives. How can we tell if the trials that we face are due to the gospel or because of our own attitude or behavior?

### II. Judgment and Justice at Christ’s Return

*(Review 2 Thessalonians 1:5–12 with the class.)*

As the lesson points out, God’s judgment is troubling to many. The description of Christ’s “inflicting vengeance” *(ESV)* on the wicked, as described in verse 8, seems amiss. How can this picture of Jesus be reconciled with the loving Jesus in the Gospels? Here it is helpful to note that the English word *vengeance* is not the best translation of the word that Paul uses in the Greek. The problem is that the word *vengeance* in English is used in an excessively brutal sense today. For example, Dictionary.com defines the phrase “with a vengeance” as something that is done “to an unreasonable, excessive, or surprising degree.” This can certainly be seen in the kind of sadistic and excessive violence that Hollywood packs into movies involving someone seeking vengeance.

The word in Greek that the *ESV* translates as “vengeance” and the NIV translates as “punish” has no connection to the way in which our society has come to look at vengeance. The word in Greek *(ekdikēsis)* comes from the word for “just,” “righteous,” or “justice” *(dikaios)* and literally means “the giving out of justice.” This theme of justice is what Paul is focusing on in this passage. He has already mentioned God’s “righteous” judgment in verse 5 and described God’s actions as “just” in verse 6. While God still has to deal with sin and sinners who have continually refused His appeals to repent, we can take heart that God will act justly and fairly and with no sadistic element in His judgment.

A second word that deserves mention is the word *revealed* in verse 7. The New Testament uses three words to refer to the return of Jesus. In 1 Thessalonians we have already encountered the word *parousia* (see Bible Commentary section in lesson 8). The other two words are *apocalypse* and *epiphany*. The word used here is *apocalypse*. It literally means “to uncover something that has been hidden.” Although Christ is hidden to the eyes of the world today, soon He will be revealed. What a day that will be!

**Consider This:** The theme of God’s justice is an important concept in Scripture and is particularly meaningful to those who have been wronged. In what sense is God’s justice good news for you?
STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. Paul says Jesus will return “in flaming fire” (2 Thess. 1:8, ESV). What is “fire” a symbol of when associated with God and/or judgment? Consider the following passages: Deut. 4:24, Exod. 3:2, Isa. 33:11–14, 66:15, Rev. 1:14.

2. James says that the testing of our faith during the trials we experience can produce steadfastness (James 1:4, ESV). Trials can, of course, also cause people to become spiritually discouraged and to surrender their faith. How can we respond to such trials so that our faith will grow instead of waver?

Application Questions:

1. God can use our experience during trials to help others with similar difficulties (2 Cor. 1:3–6). In what ways could your experiences with difficulties be used to encourage others?

2. Paul was continually praying for the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 1:11). Is there anyone who needs your continual prayers? If so, what can you do to keep your prayers and faith strong?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Class members may be tempted to think that this lesson applies primarily to Christians facing physical persecution around the world rather than to their own personal circumstances. Use the following activity to make this week’s lesson more applicable to the entire class.

Activity: Point out to the class that Paul refers to the challenges that are faced by the Thessalonians as both “persecutions” and “afflictions” (2 Thess. 1:4, ESV). Explain that while the former refers to assaults made on believers, the latter is more general and could refer to any number of difficulties in life. Have class members come up with a list of things that might fall into the category of “afflictions.” Then discuss with the class the significance of keeping both these terms in mind as we reflect on this week’s lesson.
Sabbath Afternoon

**Read for This Week’s Study:** 2 Thess. 2:1–12, Matt. 24:1–14, Zech. 3:1, Dan. 8:8–11, Acts 2:22.

**Memory Text:** “Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, ESV).

**Key Thought:** In correcting the Thessalonians’ false theology of last-day events, Paul reveals truth about end-time deceptions.

In the midst of all Paul’s words of encouragement as well as exhortation, he wrote about end-time events, including the greatest end-time event of all, the second coming of Jesus.

In this week’s passage, though Paul talks about the end, his emphasis is a bit different from that which came before. For one thing, he already told the Thessalonians the details while he was with them. For another, his goal in this text is pastoral, to calm them and persuade them to be more patient regarding end-time events and to warn them about the false teachings being circulated on that topic.

The opening of this week’s passage (2 Thess. 2:1, 2) contains several Greek words that point back to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11, such as the coming of our Lord (1 Thess. 4:15), the gathering (1 Thess. 4:17), and the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2). To some extent, this week’s passage is a clarification of what Paul said earlier. In it he reveals truths that we ourselves need to understand today.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 22.*
The Problem (2 Thess. 2:1–3)

What is the topic addressed by Paul in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians? How are these words relevant to us today? In what way do we face similar challenges within our church regarding end-time events (date-setting, conspiracy theories, and the like), however different our context may be? What similar principle do we find here that we also constantly confront? 2 Thess. 2:1–3.

There is no clear evidence in this passage that the church was asking questions about the second coming of Jesus. Paul himself perceives a problem and addresses it. The concept of “gathering to him” recalls that which Paul wrote in the previous letter (1 Thess. 4:15–17).

In this passage, Paul’s words recall the warning that Jesus Himself had given (Matt. 24:1–13). The Thessalonians had been “quickly” destabilized by conflicting information that they had received in the short time since Paul had written his first letter.

Paul doesn’t identify the specific source of their confusion. Perhaps it hadn’t even been revealed to him. By “spirit” (2 Thess. 2:2) he likely refers to a prophetic teaching, either that of a false prophet or a misunderstanding of Paul’s first letter. The second possible source is the spoken word, a teaching passed from mouth to mouth among the members. When he mentions a letter “supposed to have come from us” (NIV), Paul is either referring to a letter forged in his name or a misuse of one of his genuine letters.

No matter how carefully a pastor may watch over a church, there are multiple ways in which false ideas can take root. It is sometimes easier for members to accept a report or rumor than to examine the Scriptures carefully for themselves. Sometimes the new ideas may even be biblical to a point but are promoted out of balance with complementary Bible teachings.

The latter seems to have been the problem in Thessalonica. The Thessalonians knew many correct things about the second coming of Jesus and the events preceding it. But they tended to emphasize one extreme or another of the teaching without its balancing perspectives. They had failed to heed Jesus’ warning about chasing after signs of His return (Matt. 24:4–8). As a result, in 1 Thessalonians they lamented the delay of Jesus’ return (1 Thess. 4:13–15). In this chapter they seem to have drawn the conclusion that they are already in the midst of final events.
Paul’s Short Answer (2 Thess. 2:3, 4)

In the short interval between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the Thessalonian church members became confused about the meaning of what Paul wrote in the first letter. They drew the conclusion that the Second Coming was either at hand or had already come in some secret way (2 Thess. 2:2). Paul’s short answer to this problem? “That can’t possibly be true. There are too many things that haven’t happened yet.”

The confusion in Thessalonica caused Paul to write his most extensive outline of final events. Had he not done so, it would not have been preserved for us.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4. What does Paul tell us about “the man of sin” (NKJV) in these verses? What principles do we find here that help us to understand what Paul is discussing?

__________________________

__________________________

Verses 3 and 4 are an incomplete sentence in the original. “That day will not come” is missing in the Greek and is supplied in most translations. Paul lists the things that have to happen before Jesus can come. There will be a “falling away” (the Greek word *apostasia* for “apostasy”), and then “the man of lawlessness” will be revealed. That revelation is described in 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10 as the working of Satan just before Jesus comes (which we will examine more closely in Wednesday’s lesson). But before that revelation of wickedness, there is a period of “mystery” and restraint (2 Thess. 2:6, 7).

Verse 4 is a description of the man of sin (or “lawlessness”), who operates under cover for a time and is then revealed at the end. He opposes God, exalts himself above God, sits in the temple, and proclaims that he is God. This verse is filled with allusions to Old and New Testament texts. The “opposer” recalls Satan in Zechariah 3:1. Exalting himself above God and usurping God’s place in the heavenly temple recalls the little horn of Daniel 8. Showing himself to be God recalls Satan in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28; it also points to the blaspheming power of Daniel 11:36–39. So, the description of the man of sin contains elements pointing to both Satan himself and a wicked agent of Satan in the course of Christian history.

In what subtle ways are each of us susceptible to having the same kind of attitude as we see revealed here in this “man of sin”?
The Restrainer (2 Thess. 2:5–7)

According to Paul, what two things characterized the world situation at the time he wrote? How do we see the great controversy revealed in these verses?  2 Thess. 2:6, 7.

Combining these verses with the previous ones, we can see that Paul is outlining three stages of history from his time until the end. The final stage begins at the Second Coming. Before this stage is the revelation of the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:3), also known as the lawless one (2 Thess. 2:8). And before that stage is a time of mystery and restraint (2 Thess. 2:6, 7).

While we would like very much to fully understand Paul’s meaning here, there are a number of uncertainties in these verses. The restraining power is neuter (a thing) in verse 6 and masculine (a person) in verse 7. The lawless one (masculine, vs. 8) is neuter in verse 7 (“mystery of lawlessness”), neither is it clear (vs. 7) whether the restraining power is taken out of the way or has the authority to remove itself (the ESV translates correctly—“until he is out of the way”).

Who is the restrainer, or power of restraint, in these verses? It is present in Paul’s day; it is upholding the law (a power that restrains lawlessness, vs. 7); it is on a divine time mission; and it is powerful enough to restrain the working of Satan (vs. 9).


In much of the New Testament the events leading up to the Second Coming follow from the final proclamation of the gospel (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10; Rev. 14:6, 7). In this case, then, it’s possible that God Himself is the Restrainer described by Paul, holding the final events back until everyone has had a chance to hear the gospel.

How much restraint do you need in your life? That is, when tempted, how can you learn to claim the power of God to restrain you from doing what you know is wrong?
The Antichrist Revealed (2 Thess. 2:8–10)

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10. What’s especially important in all this about the phrase, “they received not the love of the truth”?

The man of sin was introduced in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4. Through much of Christian history he has operated to undermine God’s law (particularly the Sabbath) and to usurp powers that belong only to Christ. In passages such as Daniel 7:20–25 (the little horn) and Revelation 13:1–7 (the beast from the sea), this same power operates after the fall of the pagan Roman Empire, combining both religious and secular authority to persecute the saints of God. The only power in history that fits all the specifications of these prophecies is the papacy. Many interpreters from the Middle Ages, and even to this day, have designated this institution as the antichrist. (Only in the past century or two have the vast majority of Christians moved away from this interpretation, an interesting move in itself in light of our understanding of last-day events). This identification of the papacy fits the specifications of 2 Thessalonians 2 that the man of sin would be both masculine (a person) and neuter (a world power or institution).

In verse 7, “mystery of lawlessness” (NKJV) is an appropriate designation for his activity. But at the close of history, just before the Second Coming, there will be an even more worldwide, open defiance of God and His laws. The continuity of powers, both in this passage and elsewhere (Daniel 7 and Revelation 13), indicates that the papacy will play a major role at the end of time, as well.

What earlier work of God in the course of history will the final deception counterfeit? Compare 2 Thess. 2:9 with Acts 2:22.

Today’s passage draws back the curtain to reveal an even greater antichrist behind the one that has operated among the nations in the course of history. Satan himself is the author and finisher of the deceptions of the end time. As the return of Jesus approaches, events will force him into a final act of desperation. Through counterfeit miracles he will attempt to draw people’s attention away from the gospel (the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus) and even the Second Coming itself.

Dwell on this idea of “the love of the truth.” How do we “receive” it? Why is having this love so crucial for anyone who doesn’t want to get caught up in any spiritual deception, especially during the last days? How can we learn, even now, to “receive the love of the truth”?
Truth and Lies (2 Thess. 2:10–12)

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:10–12. Why does God allow so many to be deceived? According to this passage, what have the wicked rejected?

Verse 11 is a text that many people find extremely challenging. Paul states very directly, “God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie” (2 Thess. 2:11, NIV). The knee-jerk response to this text is something like, “How can a God of truth send deception? How can He act the same as Satan at the end?” (compare 2 Thess. 2:11 with 2 Thess. 2:9).

In today’s passage Paul draws back the curtain and gives us a glimpse of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, which involves much more than just the affairs of this earth and its history. Satan has accused God of being unreasonable, a bully, and a deceiver. In the final crisis of earth’s history, God “sends” a delusion upon the wicked, not because He lies but because He allows the wicked to choose lies over truth and, thus, expose the outworking of decisions that they have already made (2 Thess. 2:12). He simply allows them to bear the fruits of their wrong actions. The events of the end time clearly expose the mind and character of Satan and his followers for all to see.

The process of delusion begins when people reject the gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 10 the wicked refuse to receive the love of the truth. The offer of salvation in the gospel is the subtext that lies behind the apocalyptic powers of 2 Thessalonians 2. Through its teachings and practices, the papacy has undermined the gospel. That work continues until it is exposed by the final events described in 2 Thessalonians 2:8–12. Thus, the final proclamation of the gospel (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 14:6, 7) sets the stage for both the final judgment and the delusions of the end time.

In the end, whatever the outward political and religious manifestations of the great controversy as it plays out here on earth, the gospel of Jesus Christ, not political events, has always been the crucial divide between good and evil throughout Christian history. Antichrist reveals its true character by usurping the life, death, and heavenly reign of Jesus. All other actors in the drama play subordinate roles.

Read carefully 2 Thessalonians 2:12. For what key reason do people not receive the truth? How have you experienced this principle in your own life? That is, how has the “pleasure” of unrighteousness, even subtly, kept your mind from being open to truth?
Further Study: “The apostle Paul warned the church not to look for the coming of Christ in his day. ‘That day shall not come,’ he says, ‘except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Not till after the great apostasy, and the long period of the reign of the ‘man of sin,’ can we look for the advent of our Lord. The ‘man of sin,’ which is also styled ‘the mystery of iniquity,’ ‘the son of perdition,’ and ‘that wicked,’ represents the papacy, which, as foretold in prophecy, was to maintain its supremacy for 1260 years.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 356.

“As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. . . . In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. . . . Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive.”—Pages 624, 625.

“In bearing the message, make no personal thrusts at other churches, not even the Roman Catholic Church. Angels of God see in the different denominations many who can be reached only by the greatest caution. Therefore let us be careful of our words. . . . Upon these themes silence is eloquence. Many are deceived. Speak the truth in tones and words of love.”—Ellen G. White, Evangelism, p. 576.

Discussion Questions:

1. Today many believe that the papacy has changed, and in some ways it has. Yet, on the basic issues of salvation it still seeks to usurp all that Christ has done and is doing for us. It is still the power depicted in prophecy. How can we stand firm in our biblical position regarding Rome while, at the same time, doing it with Christian love, forbearance, and tact?

2. As a church we are constantly being confronted with people who come up with new dates for final events, new charts, new conspiracy theories about this group or that. While we must remain open to new light, how should we deal with these challenges?

Summary: By correcting some of the Thessalonians’ wrong views about last-day events, Paul gave us precious truth on the topic. We must always remember, though, that the crucial issue of the last days is not the timing of events or even all the details, but on which side of the great controversy do we choose to be.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize that the only recourse against falling prey to Satan’s end-time deceptions is to foster a love of spiritual truth in his or her life.

**Feel:** Sense the need to grow in a knowledge and love of the truth as revealed in Scripture.

**Do:** Resolve to study God’s Word on a daily basis and allow it to transform his or her life.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God’s Truth Guards Against Deception

- **A** To correct the mistaken idea that the Second Coming was already secretly underway in his day, Paul lists a series of events that must occur first. Which events does Paul list?
- **B** To what extent have the events that Paul listed been fulfilled today?
- **C** Before Christ returns, Satan seeks to deceive the world. What words in the passage of the Key Text point to falsehood or deception? What is the only protection from being deceived?

II. Feel: A Desire to Know the Truth

- **A** Jesus said, “‘The truth will set you free’” (John 8:32, NIV). What truth is Jesus talking about? How have you found God’s truth to be liberating?
- **B** What reasons might someone have for not wanting to know the truth? How is that dangerous?

III. Do: Learning to Love the Truth

- **A** What does loving the truth look like in everyday life?
- **B** How can a person move beyond simply knowing the truth to actually loving the truth?

**Summary:** Learning to love the truth of God’s Word is the only protection against being overcome by Satan’s deceptions.
Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: A love for the truth will protect the followers of God from the powerful worldwide deceptions that Satan will enact just before the return of Christ.

Could the majority of the world’s inhabitants be deceived by a final end-time deception perpetrated by Satan? While the idea might sound difficult to believe at first, individuals certainly less capable than the master of deception himself have deceived our “sophisticated” world with their fraudulence. One such example is the reported discovery, in April 1983, of the “Hitler Diaries.” According to news reports, Hitler’s handwritten diaries had been rescued by a German general from a crashed Nazi aircraft near Dresden in 1945. The German magazine Stern had learned of the discovery in 1980 and had paid five million dollars to have the documents smuggled out of East Germany. English publication rights were then sold to Newsweek magazine and the Sunday Times.

To determine the authenticity of the diaries, Stern had commissioned three separate handwriting analyses of one page from one of the diaries by experts in Europe and the United States. In each case the experts had agreed; it was Hitler’s handwriting. In addition to these tests, the Sunday Times asked Hugh Trevor-Rope, a world-class expert on Hitler, to closely examine the volumes. After initially viewing the volumes, Trevor-Rope reported in the Sunday Times that in his professional opinion the diaries were authentic.

Two days before their first installment in the Sunday Times, Trevor-Rope began to express doubts about the documents. After additional tests were conducted, the diaries were declared to be forgeries. They were ultimately traced to Konrad Kujau, a small-town crook with a gift for forgery. Kujau later explained how he had fooled the experts. He had gleaned details about Hitler’s life from published biographies, invented incidental details, imitated Hitler’s handwriting, and poured tea on the pages and struck them against a table in order to create an old and worn appearance. He was arrested and sentenced to nearly five years in prison. —“Konrad Kujau,” London Times, September 14, 2000.

Consider This: If a small-town crook could deceive so many experts, just imagine how skillful Satan’s end-time deceptions will be. What can we do in order to make sure that we are not hoodwinked then?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Staying on Course (Review 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 with the class.)

While our tendency is probably to jump immediately to the end-time deceptions that Paul warns against in this passage, it is important to first understand the context in which Paul frames his later remarks. In the opening three verses of chapter 2, we learn that Paul’s ultimate concern is for the spiritual well-being of the new converts in Thessalonica. They were off to a good start, but now Paul has learned that speculation about end-time events has them so worried that they are in danger of losing their focus regarding the ways in which they should live life now.

Paul describes the type of spiritual agitation that they are facing with two words: shaken and alarmed. The word shaken refers to the type of swaying motion generated by wind or wave. Here Paul seems to have in mind the image of a ship nearly ready to come free from its moorings or one being tossed about in a tempest. His use of the word alarmed points to the more internal emotions of fear that one experiences when startled. This type of spiritual angst is highly destructive to the Christian life. It gets people so worked up about that which is going to happen in the future that they struggle to live by faith in the present. Jesus warned against this danger, in Matthew 24, where He said, “‘And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed’” (Matt. 24:6, ESV).

What is the source of the Thessalonians’ alarm? Some of the Thessalonians had come to the conclusion that Christ had already returned. As strange as this might sound, it should not really surprise us. New believers are always more susceptible to false teachings given that they have not had the time to be grounded in Scripture. Because a literal interpretation of the Second Coming would clearly argue against the idea that Jesus had already returned, we can conclude only that some of the Thessalonians must have assumed that Christ had returned spiritually. Something similar, perhaps, to the modern belief of Jehovah Witnesses who maintain that the second coming of Jesus took place spiritually in 1914.

Consider This: Paul was worried that the Thessalonians might become so alarmed with final events that they would stop living for Christ in the present. As we anticipate the soon return of Christ, how can we guard against letting our faith go to one extreme or another?

II. The Great Rebellion (Review 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12 with the class.)
Having already told the Thessalonians that Christ’s return would be sudden and unexpected (1 Thess. 5:2), Paul now explains that Christ could not have returned already because there are certain events that must occur first. The first event will be a great “falling away” (2 Thess. 2:3, NKJV) or a “rebellion” against God orchestrated by the powers of evil (compare Matt. 24:10–12; Acts 20:29, 30; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; 4:3, 4).

In addition to the spiritual apostasy, Paul adds that the man of sin (or lawlessness) must be revealed. The fact that this man must be revealed indicates he is an individual who prefers to keep his identity hidden. While Paul does not specifically identify this individual, the characteristics that he does mention provide some clues. First, his actions are similar to the malicious behavior of Satan himself. Like Satan he claims to be God and desires to sit on God’s throne (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28). And as Satan opposes God and His followers (Zech. 3:1, 2), so the man of sin is one who “opposes” God and His work. But, as the lesson also points out, Paul’s terminology of the man of sin, in 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10, parallels the description of the little-horn power in Daniel that was used by Satan to hinder God’s followers and His work (compare Dan. 8:9–12, 23–25). These two clues point to Satan himself and the various “frontmen” that he has used down through the ages in order to do his work of deception.

At the end of time, Satan himself will attempt to gain the worship of the world by pulling off the greatest deception ever seen—a counterfeit Second Coming! Paul indicates this by using the very same word that he has used to describe the return of Jesus (Greek parousia) to describe the “coming” of the man of sin (Greek parousia, 2 Thess. 2:9). In an attempt to legitimize his counterfeit “coming,” Satan will perform “miracles, signs, and lying wonders”—nearly the same phrase that the apostle Peter used in order to testify to the truthfulness of Jesus’ ministry (Acts 2:22).

Paul’s point is clear. The final deception will be so convincing that only those who are willing to “receive the love of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:10, NKJV) will not be fooled (compare Matt. 24:24, Mark 13:22).

**Consider This:** In line with the teaching of the Protestant Reformers, Seventh-day Adventists have historically identified the man of sin with the papacy. What danger is there, however, in focusing exclusively on the role of the papacy in end-time events? That is, though we must never forget its role, the issues are bigger than just the role of the papacy.

► **STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. In addition to the story of Jacob’s deception of his father Isaac, what
other stories in the Bible involve one person deceiving another? What can we learn from these accounts regarding ways in which to avoid deception?

2 Paul says that those who will be lost “refused to love the truth” (2 Thess. 2:10, NIV). While the fate of these individuals is to be lamented, what “good news” might we see in the use of the word refused?

3 Pilate once asked Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). In light of the importance that Paul places on the “truth” in 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 12, how would you answer this question?

Application Questions:

1 God is described as the one who restrains evil through the preaching of His Word. How is God’s power of restraint present in your life?

2 Many people will be deceived by Satan’s deceptions. What can you do now, not only to protect yourself but to protect others who are within the sphere of your influence?

>STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** As Friday’s section of the lesson points out, many people today do not see the papacy as a threat, and certainly not as a major player aligned against God’s people in the final events of earth’s history. With this in mind, and keeping fully before us the Adventist perspective on the papacy (which is powerfully supported in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy), it would still be wise to handle this matter with sensitivity. The following activity may be helpful in this regard.

**Activity:** Point out to the class that Satan has actively been working since the resurrection of Christ to undermine the work of Christ in this world and in the lives of His followers. Divide the class up into groups and have them come up with a list of people and institutions that might be seen as “manifestations” of the ultimate end-time “man of sin.”
Lesson 13  *September 22–28

(page 104 of Standard Edition)

Keeping the Church Faithful
(2 Thess. 2:13–3:18)

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15, ESV).

Key Thought: Even with all the grand and glorious promises for the future, we have to deal with daily challenges and struggles in the church. The Thessalonian church was no exception.

Churches are a lot like plants. If a plant does not grow, it will die. In other words, change is wired into the way plants were designed by God. Similarly, a church that does not change and grow also will die. But not all change is good. Change can lead us away from who we are. It can cause us to lose touch with God’s purpose for us. The Seventh-day Adventist Church must be especially on guard because this present-truth message is being proclaimed by no one but us! That’s a heavy responsibility—one we all, whether laity or ministry, must never forget.

Through revelation and Spirit-guided consensus, God has led the church to even more light. The light of the past helps the church to navigate its way through the treacherous waters of change. Paul’s final word to the Thessalonians gives us inspired guidance in this crucial area.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 29.*

149
Faithful by God’s Choice (2 Thess. 2:13–17)

The language of this section recalls the prayer at the beginning of 1 Thessalonians. It is almost as if Paul is returning to the place where he began, creating a natural conclusion to this pair of letters. Paul here expresses his concern that the believers in Thessalonica not deviate from the path on which he has placed them.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17. Why does Paul thank God for the Thessalonians? What does he ask them to do in this passage? In what ways are these words so pertinent to us today, so near the end?

The lives of the Thessalonians provided evidence to Paul that they had been chosen as “first fruits to be saved” (ESV). Some translations say “from the beginning.” Though salvation is a gift, the believer experiences it through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth. The life of the believer is more than just a subjective experience; it is solidly grounded in truth.

That is why Paul is so concerned that the Thessalonians hold to the doctrines they have been taught, both by letter and the spoken word. People’s grasp of truth often slips with the passage of time, which is why we must always be affirmed by those who preach and teach us.

In the early days of the church, there was even a preference for oral tradition over written tradition. Oral tradition is less subject to unintentional distortion. Tone of voice and gestures communicate meaning more accurately than do words on a page. This is why preaching as a method of communication never grows old.

But written tradition, as in the letters of Paul, is less subject to intentional distortion by those who would alter the gospel for their own purposes. The written word provides a secure and unchangeable norm by which one can test the oral messages that come through preaching. In the book of Acts, the Bereans were commended because they combined attention to the oral messages with careful examination of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

Read again the texts for today. So many forces are always at work trying to pry us away from the truth. Look at how you have changed over time. Do these changes reveal a slow, steady settling into the truth or slow, steady movement away from it? In other words, in what direction is your life moving?
Confidence in the Face of Evil (2 Thess. 3:1–5)

In today’s world many people laugh at the idea of a literal Satan. In their mind, he’s a myth, a holdover from a superstitious and pre-scientific era. They feel that good and bad are simply the random consequences of cause and effect; or, in some people’s minds, good and bad are only culturally constructed concepts relative to specific times and places, nothing more.

But the Bible clearly asserts that Satan is real. And it is often to his advantage in some parts of the world to hide himself or even allow himself to be mocked in the form of a red devil with horns. The caricature goes a long way in making people think he’s not real, which is exactly what he wants. ("The devil made me do it!" one comedian used to famously mock.)

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1–5. Though the challenges to our faith are out there, Paul expresses hope. On what is that hope based, and what is the condition upon which we can be certain to claim it?


Paul begins this passage with a request for prayer (as in 1 Thess. 5:25) that the gospel will spread rapidly and be honored through his work. Paul also wants the Thessalonians to pray that he will be delivered from evil men (2 Thess. 3:2). The expression here implies that he has in mind specific individuals whom the recipients of the letter might even know.

Paul follows this with wordplay (2 Thess. 3:2, 3). Not all men have “faith” (trust in, or commitment to, God), but the Lord is “faithful” (dependable—one who inspires faith and commitment). This faithful Lord is dependable and will guard them against the evil one, or Satan. The good news is that, though Satan is more powerful than we are, the Lord is more powerful than Satan, and we can find safety and power in the Lord.

Paul ends this passage (2 Thess. 3:4, 5) by once more commending the Thessalonians and offering a prayer in their behalf. He is confident that they are doing what he has asked and that they will continue to do so in spite of the opposition of Satan and the people he inspires. He offers a “wish-prayer” (2 Thess. 3:5) that the Lord direct their attention to “the love of God” and “the patience of Christ” (NKJV).

Even amid trials and suffering, Paul’s letters are always so full of faith, hope, and certainty. How can we learn to have this faith, hope, and certainty for ourselves, regardless of our often difficult circumstances?
Scripture and Tradition (2 Thess. 3:6–8)

When Jesus walked this earth there was no New Testament. The Bible of Jesus was the “Old Testament.” But, from the start, obedience to Jesus’ spoken words was the wise thing that His followers did (Matt. 7:24–27). Jesus’ words and actions continued to be authoritative for the church in the years that followed (1 Thess. 4:15, Acts 20:35, 1 Cor. 11:23–26). Then, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were guided to rightly interpret the words of Jesus and the significance of His actions (John 15:26, 27; 16:13–15). And before the first generation of Christians had passed off the scene, the writings of the apostles were considered fully equal to those of the Old Testament prophets and could be called “Scripture” (2 Pet. 3:2, 16).

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6–8, 14. According to these texts, what would Paul include in his concept of truth?

By the time Paul arrived in Thessalonica, the early church considered the sayings of Jesus and the teachings of the apostles as supremely authoritative. Tradition in New Testament times was not necessarily a dirty word; it could refer to the church’s memory of the sayings and actions of Jesus and include the oral teachings and writings of the apostles. Tradition was to them much the same as the Scriptures are to us. It could be commanded and was to be obeyed.

For the Thessalonians, tradition meant more than just the letters of Paul. It included all that Paul had said to them while he was in Thessalonica, and included also his actions, which they were to imitate. The fact that Paul worked hard to support himself in Thessalonica did not merely show that he cared for them (1 Thess. 2:9); it was a “tradition” that he expected them to apply to their own lives.

Paul was not idle while he was among them; he did not eat other people’s food without payment. He labored “night and day” so as not to be a burden to anyone. And anyone in Thessalonica who lived differently was “out of order.” So, Paul’s definition of disorderly people was not limited to those who were disruptive in the church or community; he broadened it here to include anyone who did not follow the teachings or practices of the apostles.

These texts reveal how important Paul’s actions were for the Thessalonians. Though he had truth directly from the Lord (Gal. 1:1), Paul bore witness as much by his life and actions as by his words. How well do our lives reflect the truths that we have been given?
In these verses Paul applies the tradition of what he did and said to a specific situation. A significant group of members was disorderly or out of order (2 Thess. 3:6, 11). Paul had mentioned the problem in the previous letter and addressed it gently there (1 Thess. 4:11, 12; 5:14). But he uses much stronger language here.

As an apostle, Paul could have required the church to provide him with income, housing, and food. But in 1 Thessalonians he had set an example among them of “working night and day” in order not to be a burden on them (1 Thess. 2:9). This was an example of love. But according to 2 Thessalonians 3:8, he also worked “night and day” in order to create a model of how everyone should take care of their own needs, as much as possible.

If Paul had only set an example, some could have responded that the tradition was not clear. But Paul had also addressed this issue with words. During the short time he was with them in person, he often expressed (as the Greek imperfect tense implies) a popular saying as a command, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10, ESV).

In this passage Paul is not criticizing the efforts to care for those in need, those who can’t take care of themselves. After all, Jesus Himself left a powerful example of compassion toward those whose circumstances in life had left them helpless or destitute.

Instead, the target of Paul’s concern was a group of people in the church who were willfully idle. They were busybodies, minding everyone’s business except their own (2 Thess. 3:11). Like some of the popular philosophers in the ancient world, these believers preferred a life of ease over labor. Perhaps they spent their time discussing theology or criticizing the behavior of others instead of earning their way. Paul commands them “in the Lord Jesus Christ” to follow his example and earn the right to speak by caring for their own needs first (3:12).

How amazing that, even so early in church history, Paul had to deal with so many problems among the members. How should this protect us (and especially new members) from the expectation that our churches are going to be filled with saintly people? More important, how can we be a positive force in our local church despite our own faults and weaknesses?
Tough Love (2 Thess. 3:13–15)

According to Matthew 18:15–17, how is the church supposed to treat a person who has been disfellowshiped?

The matter of church discipline is one of the most difficult issues that a local church faces. Often an errant member is another member’s brother, mother, son, cousin, or best friend. Some members prefer never to discipline anyone; others prefer harsh sanctions. How does a church find the will of God in the midst of so many competing interests?

Matthew 18 suggests a clear and simple process. First, a one-on-one conversation between the offender and the one offended. The context indicates that forgiveness is to be the goal of that conversation, whenever possible (Matt. 18:21–35). Second, the offended member is to take one or two others along to avoid confusion as to what is being said by one party or the other. Only after these first two steps have been carefully followed should the process move to the church in business session. Then, if the offender does not respond to the church as a whole, he or she is to be treated as “a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:17, ESV).

Here is the problem. What does it mean to treat someone like a Gentile and a tax collector? There are at least two different possibilities. On the one hand, Jesus could be calling the church to shun the offender the way the Gentiles and tax collectors were shunned in the society in which He grew up. On the other hand, it could be a call to treat the outcast the way Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors (with compassion and forgiveness).

What does Paul have to say about church discipline? 2 Thess. 3:13–15.

Rightly applying Matthew 18 and 2 Thessalonians 3 to contemporary life is a challenge. No two people are alike. No two situations are alike. In some cases forgiveness softens the heart of an offender and brings reconciliation to the church. In other cases hardened offenders may respond only to a love that is tough enough to confront and administer consequences. This is why the General Conference does not disfellowship anyone. Such delicate processes are best handled by the local church, where the offender is best known.

Tough love is not a license for abuse. According to verse 15, the person being disciplined is still to be treated like family. The church must remain conscious that the offender is a brother “for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:15, 1 Cor. 8:11, NKJV).

What experiences have you had with church discipline? How can the church maintain a balance between confrontation and acceptance?
Further Study: “The Thessalonian believers were greatly annoyed by men coming among them with fanatical ideas and doctrines. Some were ‘disorderly, working not at all, but . . . busybodies.’ The church had been properly organized, and officers had been appointed to act as ministers and deacons. But there were some, self-willed and impetuous, who refused to be subordinate to those who held positions of authority in the church.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 261.

“Paul was not wholly dependent upon the labor of his hands for support while at Thessalonica. . . . Philippians 4:16. Notwithstanding the fact that he received this help he was careful to set before the Thessalonians an example of diligence, so that none could rightfully accuse him of covetousness, and also that those who held fanatical views regarding manual labor might be given a practical rebuke.”—Pages 348, 349.

“The custom of supporting men and women in idleness by private gifts or church money encourages them in sinful habits, and this course should be conscientiously avoided. Every man, woman, and child should be educated to do practical, useful work. All should learn some trade. It may be tentmaking, or it may be business in other lines; but all should be educated to use the members of their body to some purpose, and God is ready and willing to increase the adaptability of all who will educate themselves to industrious habits.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 912.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does our church keep its balance between hanging onto truths confirmed in the past and following the advancing light of God? How can we know when new “light” is, indeed, “light” and not deception?

2. How do we deal with unruly and troublesome church members who always seem to be complaining about something? At the same time, what about those who are expressing concerns over real problems?

3. Mentally summarize Paul’s essential message in these two letters to the Thessalonians in a way that makes them relevant to the situation in our church today.

Summary: Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians have taught us a great deal about how to be a church in a difficult environment. However different the immediate context he dealt with is to ours, the principles he espoused are enduring and eternal, because they are inspired by the Lord Himself.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:18

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Expect to encounter difficulties and challenges within the Christian life that will require him or her to stand firm in his or her faith by relying upon God.

**Feel:** Sense his or her need of God’s abiding grace and strength in order to preserve him or her during challenging times.

**Do:** Seek to experience God’s sustaining grace in his or her life on a daily basis.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Difficult Times Will Come**

A. Sometimes Christians assume that after deciding to follow Jesus the real difficulties of life will cease. What does Paul say in 2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:17 that indicates that Christians are not exempt from experiencing difficult times?

B. Although believers and unbelievers both experience challenges in life, what advantage do the Christians have during difficult times?

II. **Feel: God Is Faithful**

A. To encourage the Thessalonians, Paul reminds them that God “is faithful” (3:3, NKJV). In what ways has God shown Himself to be faithful in the scripture?

B. How has God’s faithfulness been an encouragement to you during difficult times?

III. **Do: Seek God’s Help**

A. What should our daily response be as we grasp the truth of God’s faithfulness to us?

B. How can we express in prayer both our need and our acceptance of God’s sustaining grace?

**Summary:** Instead of being surprised and discouraged by the presence of difficulties in the Christian life, believers should take hope in the knowledge that God is present with them in order to provide the strength to overcome.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God’s sustaining and enabling grace is sufficient to strengthen us so that we may endure the challenges to our faith that we will encounter from both within and without the church.

Paul’s final admonition to the new believers in Thessalonica is evocative of the instructions that a father gave to his children on a family vacation several years ago. At the request of his children, the family decided to spend a day at an amusement park. Because they had never gone to an amusement park before, the kids were excited and determined to go on every ride possible. Although everyone was excited, the parents knew that if their children were not careful, they could get hurt. As they went from one ride to another, the parents told them what to expect and always to remember to “Hold on tight!”

Paul says the same thing to the Thessalonians as he draws his second letter to a close. “Stand firm and hold” on (2 Thess. 2:15, ESV) is Paul’s basic counsel. He knows that the Christian life is filled with difficulties and hardships, and he wants the Thessalonians to know from the beginning that life will not always be easy. Instead of being taken by surprise when difficult times come (even difficult times within the church), Paul wants to inspire the believers with an attitude of determination that, no matter what kind of experience they encounter on the “ride” of life, they will “hold on” to Jesus.

**Consider This:** Why do some Christians seem to wilt under difficulty while others are able to face them with confidence?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**I. The Basis of Our Stability** *(Review 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17 with the class.)*

Fear, worry, and panic. Once someone is bitten by one of these bugs, it is often difficult to get him or her to calm down. When dealing with someone in such an agitated state, the best thing a person can do is to maintain
a calm spirit while trying to explain why such fears are completely unjustified. This is exactly what we see Paul do masterfully as he draws his second letter to the Thessalonians to a close.

As we saw earlier, the new converts in Thessalonica were a little panicky about the return of Christ. Having realized their “shaken” and “alarmed” state, Paul first set out to correct the mistaken eschatological views that were causing their fears. While they were certainly encouraged to learn that the “end” had not already occurred, some of them were still probably a little worried about being part of the group deceived and lost in the end. They exchanged one fear for another.

Paul, however, sets out to assure them that they have nothing to fear on that day. In fact, he is not even worried for them. What is the source of Paul’s assurance? First, Paul reminds them that God had chosen them from the beginning (2 Thess. 2:13). Jesus had said the same thing to His disciples. “ ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you’ ” (John 15:16, ESV). Paul is not advocating a form of predestination as Calvinists teach. He is simply saying that our salvation resides in the fact that God took the initiative to save the human race. And that means that God is not going to let anyone be lost easily. A person will be lost only because he or she deliberately and persistently refuses to respond to God’s grace. We see this in the very fact that Paul describes those who are lost as the ones who “refused” to love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10, ESV).

But even more than this, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the process of preparing us for God’s kingdom (sanctification) is something that God does in us through His Spirit (compare 1 Thess. 4:3, 5:23, 2 Thess. 2:13). No matter what Satan does or does not do, we need not live in fear. God is determined to save us as long as we are willing to let Him.

Therefore, on the basis of what God has done, is doing, and will do in our lives, Paul tells the Thessalonians to “stand firm and hold” to the things they were taught. The only way to resist false teachings is to cling to the truth. But lest the new converts start to worry again, Paul reminds them once more how much God loves them (2 Thess. 2:16) and that He is able to take their instability and turn it into stability by comforting and establishing them (vs. 17).

Consider This: Worry can be detrimental to a person’s life and faith. What reasons does Jesus give, in Matthew 6:25–34, in order to help His followers not to worry?
II. Paul’s Prayer  *(Review 2 Thessalonians 3:1–5 with the class.)*

Although we often tend to idolize the apostle Paul for the amazing things that he accomplished, Paul was just as human as the rest of us. Paul realized that he could not do the work of the Lord in his own strength. Throughout all his letters, we find Paul requesting that others pray for him and his ministry. In the opening verses of 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for two things in particular: (1) for the gospel to spread rapidly around the world and be honored and (2) that he might be preserved from evil men.

When Paul talks about the gospel spreading rapidly, he probably has in mind a swift-footed athlete in a race. Such races were part of the Isthmian Games, held in the city of Corinth every two years and the place from which Paul was most likely writing. It would not be the first time that Paul has used athletic imagery in his letters *(1 Cor. 9:24–27).* He may also have in mind the Old Testament imagery from Psalm 147:15. Paul wants the word to run swiftly, and wherever it goes, he wants people to honor it.

Paul’s second request appears to point to a specific group of people (in Greek it reads “the wicked men”) rather than just adversaries in general. Considering the opposition that Paul had recently faced from unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica, and now most recently in Corinth *(Acts 18:12)*, he probably has this group in mind. He would later encounter similar resistance from others, as well *(Acts 19:23–41, 1 Tim. 1:20)*.

**Consider This:** Paul wanted the Thessalonians to pray that the gospel would spread around the world without any hindrance. Besides prayer, what can we do in order to help the gospel to “speed ahead and be honored”?

►**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Although an apostle, Paul faced several difficulties in his life. What do the following passages tell us about the kind of adversities that Paul faced and, more important, how he was able to overcome them? *(2 Cor. 11:24–28, 12:7–10).*

2. Paul encourages the Thessalonians by reminding them that God is faithful. According to what Paul describes in 2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:17, what
type of actions does God do for His followers that illustrate some of the ways in which He is faithful?

3 In practical terms, how does God go about “comforting” our hearts (2 Thess. 2:17)?

4 Twice Paul speaks about God “establishing” His followers (2 Thess. 2:17, 3:3). What does Paul mean by this?

Application Questions:

1 Paul prays that the “Lord of Peace” will give us “peace at all times in every way” (2 Thess. 3:16, ESV). To what extent do you experience God’s peace? In what ways could you experience it more fully?

2 What can we do to make sure that we do not become “busybodies” in our Christian experience?

➤STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: As this quarter’s study guide comes to a close, end the class on a high note by focusing on the faithfulness of God. Consider using one or both of the following activities to help to make this emphasis.

Activity:
1. Word Study (where Internet service is available): Using the free online Bible concordance at www.biblegateway.com, look up the following phrases in Scripture: “God is faithful,” “Lord is faithful,” and “faithfulness.” Print a copy of the results and distribute the pages to the class. Divide the class into groups and have them come up with a list of all the ways in which God is described as being faithful in these passages. Then have group members share experiences in which they have seen those specific instances of God’s faithfulness in their lives.

2. Closing Hymn: End the class by singing or reading together hymn number 100, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal.