The Gospel Comes to Thessalonica
"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 Thess. 2:13, NIV).

Introduction Welcoming the Truth
Acts 17:1-3; 1 Thess. 2:13
Julie Keaton, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.

Imagine living in a bustling seaport on the Aegean Sea, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia during the first century a.d. Thessalonica is home to Jews and Gentiles. On his second missionary journey, Paul arrives to share with curious listeners of both groups the gospel message. The good news pours from his lips as they breathe in the salty sea air. He gives special attention to the glorious resurrection of God's Son.

When they heard this good news, the Thessalonians embraced it as the true Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). Their fledgling Christian church began to flourish, recalling the parable of the sower Jesus told during His earthly ministry. In this parable, a farmer flung seeds upon his land in hopes of a bountiful crop. Some seeds fell on packed earth, and the birds ate them. More fell on the rocks and could not take strong root. Thorns choked back the growth of other seeds. Yet those falling into the good soil produced an abundant crop. “These are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit” (Mark 4:20, NKJV).

Why do you think the Thessalonians were so convicted by Paul’s message? It’s because they knew he wasn’t just telling a story! He supported the message through intelligent reasoning. Many visiting the synagogue in which the apostle spoke would have been familiar with the prophets such as Isaiah, who foretold in detail the Savior’s coming. As Paul spoke authoritatively about the risen Jesus, he spelled out clearly the parallels of Christ’s life to the Messianic prophecies, leaving the Thessalonians convinced of the truth and excited to share the message of hope.

God’s Word has proven itself again and again in its power to change the lives of those who receive it. As you study this week, pray that your heart will be open to God’s Word and the moving of the Holy Spirit. Be assured that the Holy Scriptures are as reliable today as God’s Word was in the first century.

The Promise of a Savior (Isaiah 53:1-12)
For generations the Jews had been anticipating the arrival of their Savior. Never did they dream that He would offer salvation not only to them but to all...
humankind.

Isaiah 53:1-12 reads like a current affairs documentary of Jesus life: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2, NIV). This verse describes Jesus and how He would take humanity upon Himself. Hidden in this promise is the dark picture of His pain and torture. Most believers at that time did not want to accept a suffering Savior, only a powerful one.

This promise appeared long before the Savior. Jews studied and believed the numerous passages in their Holy Scriptures pointing to Him. Later, in Thessalonica, the message of the promised Savior would be accepted and readily believed. These people had no prior knowledge or understanding, yet their acceptance was instant.

The Scattered Sheep (Jer. 23:1-6)

Jeremiah 23:1-6 warns the “shepherds” that their sheep will be scattered. Was this God preparing the Jews for the gospel to go to the Gentiles? Here He promises not only to provide a Savior but also to gather His sheep together. There is also a promise of growth: “I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing” (Jer. 23:4, NIV).

As God enabled the early missionaries to share the gospel, He assured them that believers would be gathered together by their belief and faith. There is an eager acceptance of the gospel. Paul declares his willingness to risk his very life in the memorable passage, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16, NIV). Is there any doubt in our minds that Paul was passionate about preaching the gospel regardless of the response?

Loud and Proud (1 Thessalonians 2:1-20)

We sense a calm assurance from Paul when we read his words in 1 Thessalonians 2:4: “We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts” (NIV). He is not timid. Instead, he is loud and proud, driven by the assurance of a risen Savior and the knowledge of His return.

As God enabled the early missionaries to share the gospel, He assured them that believers would be gathered together by their belief and faith. There is an eager acceptance of the gospel. Paul declares his willingness to risk his very life in the memorable passage, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16, NIV). Is there any doubt in our minds that Paul was passionate about preaching the gospel regardless of the response?

REACT

1. What can you personally learn from Paul’s determined vision for the lost? How can you follow in his footsteps?

2. Why do you think God went to such extremes to tell the Jewish nation that they would not be the only ones saved?

3. In what practical ways can you be a missionary to “Thessalonica”?

Testimony A Message That Demands Response

Acts 17:1-10

Nathan Brown, Melbourne, Australia

In The Acts of the Apostles, the story of Paul's mission to the Thessalonians starts with his preaching focus: “In preaching to the Thessalonians, Paul appealed to the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah.” This retelling of the story revisits the major prophecies that point to Jesus.

“As with holy boldness Paul proclaimed the gospel in the synagogue at Thessalonica, a flood of light was thrown upon the true meaning of the rites and ceremonies connected with the tabernacle service.” But he also looked forward: “Paul was a believer in the second coming of Christ; so clearly and forcibly did he present the truths concerning this event, that upon the minds of many who heard there was made an impression which never wore away. . . .”

“As the truths of the gospel were thus proclaimed in Thessalonica with mighty power, the attention of large congregations was arrested: ‘Some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.’”

Yes, Paul and Silas’s message received attention, but not always the type of attention they hoped and prayed for.

Those who today teach unpopular truths need not be discouraged if at times they meet with no more favorable reception, even from those who claim to be Christians, than did Paul and his fellow workers from the people among whom they labored. The messengers of the cross must arm themselves with watchfulness and prayer, and move forward with faith and courage, working always in the name of Jesus. They must exalt Christ as man’s mediator in the heavenly sanctuary, the One in whom all the sacrifices of the Old Testament dispensation centered, and through whose atoning sacrifice the transgressors of God’s law may find peace and pardon.

REACT

1. In your experience, do people tend to react more positively or negatively to the good news of Jesus? Why do you think that is?

2. How can we smooth the way for the gospel?

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2 Ibid., pp. 228, 229.
3 Ibid., p. 230.
tuesday JULY 3

Evidence Vision of Macedonia
Acts 16:9-40; 17:1-4, 12; Rom. 1:16

Colin MacLaurin, Brisbane, Australia

Paul was on a mission, confident it was God Himself who was leading. After his earlier travel plans had been blocked, he received “a vision of a man of Macedonia” begging him for help (Acts 16:9, NIV). Attuned to the Spirit and obedient to the call, he and others immediately prepared to leave. Macedonia at that time was a Roman province located within the Balkan Peninsula, and the band first had major impact in Philippi. There, Lydia and her household received the message and were baptized. Paul and his companions also cast a fortune-telling spirit out of a slave girl and were thrown into prison. Yet good came out of even this incarceration when the jailer and his household believed in Jesus and were baptized (Acts 16:11-40).

When Paul and his fellow messengers finally arrived in Thessalonica, the entrenched Jewish leaders agitated a riotous mob to oppress them (Acts 17:1-9). The travelers reached the capital Thessalonica around A.D. 50. In the synagogue, Paul proved to them from the prophecies that Jesus was the Messiah. Some Jews and many Greeks—including some prominent women—joined them. Yet, when the mob oppressed them, Paul was ushered away to neighboring Berea, where both Jews and Greeks received the message (Acts 17:1-4; Acts 17:12). However, the Thessalonian Jews followed and stirred up more controversy, so the believers once again shunted Paul away.

The Thessalonians endured hard times because of the gospel. Yet even in the midst of severe suffering, they remained loyal (1 Thess. 1:6). Paul would endure much more persecution in his ministry; nonetheless he would boast, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16, TNIV).

The Thessalonians were truly changed by the gospel. Paul affirmed their close and encouraging community, their faith and perseverance. They looked forward to Jesus’ return. Their reputation became widespread and a model throughout the region. Though Paul corrected some flaws and encouraged them to do better still, the apostles had glory and joy in them (1 Thess. 2:19).

REACT

1. Do you listen for God’s leading through the Bible and the Spirit in order to reach new hearts with the gospel?
2. Are you excited about the gospel, and do you trust God despite resistance or slander?

wednesday JULY 4

How-to The Living Word
Romans 12:1-21; 1 Thess. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:8-10; 2 Tim. 3:14-16

Monique Owen, Perth, Western Australia

Humanity has fallen, but all is not lost. One has come to redeem humankind by His death. That “One” is Jesus, and we can find an account of His life, death, and resurrection in the New Testament gospels. John 3:16, 17 sums it up: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (NIV). After listening to Paul attest to the fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus, the believers in Thessalonica took this message to heart. Then the joy and hope that filled their hearts spilled over into every aspect of their lives. They became living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-21) and a powerful testament to the transformational love of God.

We, too, can live life to the fullest and share the joy we have in Christ with those around us. Here’s how:

Study the Bible. Paul says, “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4, NIV). When we study the Bible, we learn about God’s plan of salvation and we gain a new understanding of the world around us. We see the hand of God in history. The fulfillment of Bible prophecy shows us that His word is trustworthy and strengthens our faith.

Remember that excitement is contagious. Paul was so passionate about what he believed in that many who listened to him could not fail to be touched by it.

Say “hello” to the Holy Spirit. Pray for the Holy Spirit to enter your life. He has the power to transform it. Friend, Counselor, Comforter, ever-present Help in times of trouble—the Holy Spirit is definitely someone you should get to know.

Take action. Meet people. Help those who need it. You do not need to wait until you feel qualified to conduct in-depth Bible studies. Show the people around you how much Jesus has changed your life.

REACT

1. What are some of your favorite promises in the Bible?
2. How do these promises and the fulfillment of Scripture inspire you?
3. How do they influence the way you interact with the world around you?

thursday JULY 5

Opinion The Gospel Comes to Thessalonica
Matt. 28:19, 20

3 of 4
Kristin Thiele, Cooranbong, Australia

It has been about 2,000 years since Jesus gave His great commission in Matthew 28:19, 20. And when He did, the task must have seemed impossible. I am sure at least one of the disciples thought, The whole world? We're only a handful of people!

By the time Paul came on to the scene, the mission had picked up steam, and he was ready to take the message to new parts of the world. There was no shortage of places to go to spread the word. The hardest part of sharing the good news was getting there (that is, if you completely ignored being persecuted).

As time has marched on, there are fewer places where Christ has never been preached. For years now we have sent people out as missionaries, not just to teach a new religion but also to encourage people in the faith.

In 1948, Hugh Dickins arrived in Papua New Guinea as one of these missionaries. His mission was to deliver Sabbath School pamphlets to the villages and encourage the young people. He worked hard to fulfill his mission. For years he translated the Sabbath School lessons into simple English so these lessons would be more accessible to those he visited.

Dickins spent weeks walking to villages, sometimes being months away from his wife and children. His biggest challenge was exhaustion. There were times during which he was so tired that he would fall asleep in the middle of a conversation with his eyes open! Yet he loved his work. It was what he had wanted to do his entire life! He drew strength from his work and his family and, most of all, from the God he served.

Today, we also have opportunities to encourage others in their faith. The great commission does not end with baptism. We are meant to continue to teach each other. Like Paul's letters or like Pastor Dickins' lessons, our work is an ongoing mission. Our work of encouragement could be a kind word, a helping hand, or even a well-timed gift. Whether big or small, our acts of encouragement are designed to build up people and to honor Christ's command to make disciples of all the world.

**REACT**

1. What is the biggest challenge you face in sharing your faith?
2. What are our responsibilities to those who are “new” to the faith? “Old” in the faith?

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**friday JULY 6**

**Exploration The Ups and Downs of Ministry**

*Acts 17:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:11-13*

Cheryl Des Jarlais, Ringgold, Georgia, U.S.A.

**CONCLUDE**

Though the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Silas to Macedonia, those listening to their message of the gospel did not always respond with joy and acceptance. In Thessalonica, jealous Jews created a riot, accusing Paul and Silas of preaching that Jesus was a rival king to Caesar. However, before they were forced to leave the city, many Jews and Greeks, including a good number of women, received their message as the Word of God. Paul and Silas labored passionately and tenderly for the dearly loved young church of Thessalonica, and this church became known for their faith, acceptance of the gospel, and devotion to God—a model for other growing churches.

**CONSIDER**

- Creating a prayer list that outlines those whom you have witnessed to and labored for at home, at your workplace, or during any ministries in which you have participated. Daily lift these people up in prayer.
- Writing a letter of encouragement to someone on your prayer list, using some aspect of 1 Thessalonians 1 and 2 as a model.
- Studying the diversity of your church family. Devise a plan whereby you can get to know and support someone who is different from you in culture, background, and/or gender.
- Designing a poster that promotes some aspect of a women's ministry program in your area.
- Planning a local missionary trip, or one to modern-day Macedonia, following in Paul's footsteps.
- Writing a song based on 1 Thessalonians 2:12 that a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or babysitter could sing to a child to encourage, comfort, and urge that child to live a godly life.

**CONNECT**

lesson two JULY 7-13

Preserving Relationships

"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 Thess. 2:19, 20, NKJV).

sabbath JULY 7

Introduction The Beauty of Discipling

Prov. 27:17

Heather Hyde Thompson, Guanaja, Republic of Honduras, Central America

It is important to have a good friend. Someone who's willing to be by your side no matter what you're going through—someone who can encourage you when you're down, who enjoys hanging out with you, but most importantly, someone who's always there to remind you of Christ's goodness.

During my senior year of high school, I was asked to do an evangelistic meeting. I was excited. I was going to be touching people's lives and, I hoped, leading them to Christ. The campaign was at a church near my aunt's house. People I knew came to support me, but most importantly, they had come to hear the Word of God. It was amazing to see the types of relationships that were being built during this series. We would sing and play Bible games together. If the sermon was especially touching, we would even cry with one another. We built amazing friendships during these meetings—friendships built on love, trust, and encouragement.

Although our friendships grew stronger, we all knew that the meetings would soon end. We would no longer see each other every night or spend countless hours in fellowship with one another. However, even though the series was ending, I still held a pocketful of joy inside of me. I knew that many of the attendees had drawn closer to Christ, not only because of our series, but because of our strong relationships with each other. Many of them even told me about the transformation God had performed in their lives. Thus, I knew in my heart that many of them had found Christ and had come to the realization that life without Him is empty.

Friendships are essential for discipling. Christ demonstrated the importance of discipling through friendship in His own ministry. He showed that the only way to have lasting disciples is to build lasting friendships with other Christians and, of course, with Christ.

Are you building friendships? Are you truly lifting those to whom you minister, or are you allowing friendship opportunities to pass by?

The Word of the Lord encourages us to engage in friendship by saying, “As iron sharpens iron, / so one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17, NIV). If we are to disciple others, we are to sharpen one another through friendship and love.

sunday JULY 8

Evidence Between a Rock and a Hard Place

1 Thess. 2:3-7, 17; 1 Thess. 3:10

Jonathan Gardner, Colle guessed, Tennessee, U.S.A.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, we read that the gospel is a “stumbling block” to the Jews and “foolishness” to the Gentiles, specifically here to the Greeks. This was, in fact, the case because it had to do with the Jewish obsession with “purity.” Purity was all about the correct observance of rituals that distinguished “clean” from “unclean.” Such emphasis on purity caused them to feel separate from and superior to others. They developed rules of purity for nearly every aspect of life, including how to pick up a nail. 3 Jesus and His followers undermined these rules. All are equal in Christ. 4

How was the gospel foolishness to Gentiles? Plato taught that there were two worlds: (1) the world of ideals, which is perfect and devoid of matter, and (2) the physical world, which traps us. Death is a release from this world into the world of ideals. Such thinking renders the resurrection both obsolete and ridiculous. 5 Why would people want to stay trapped in their bodies?

Then there were the Stoics and Epicureans, with whom Paul debated on Mars’ Hill. The Epicureans rejected Plato’s teaching. They believed there was nothing at all after death—no judgment, no punishment for the wicked, and no resurrection. Indeed, most of the Christian message conflicted with Epicureanism. 6 The Stoics taught that because the soul was somehow part of God, there is no maintaining one’s identity beyond the grave and no resurrection of the physical body. 7 So whether from Jew or Greek, a Christian could expect persecution and derision, thus explaining Paul’s concern for the flock in Thessalonica.

REACT

1. Have you ever felt that others have looked down on you because you are a Christian?

2. Should we conform our message to fit the world?
monday JULY 9

Logos Upholding Eternal Relationships
Acts 17:5-34; 1 Cor. 1:18; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Thess. 2:3-7, 17; 1 Cor. 3:10

Alejandro Sarria, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.

Lindsey was excited to start college. Her eyes lit up as she walked across the beautiful campus with all the freshmen who looked as new as she did. It's hard to be a new student not knowing anybody. Thankfully, the university had many activities for them to help them get to know each other.

The first week was awesome. She met a lot of people and got acquainted with them quickly. She liked Britney best of all. They just sort of clicked and did everything together for the first few weeks. They were lunch buddies. They went to the mall together, and on weekends they would go downtown with other friends to walk around. They were having a great time those first few weeks.

Lindsey was really looking forward to the rest of the school year with her new friends and new life. After some time, however, her friends began to be a bit more cautious about the time they spent socializing. Even Britney started spending less time with Lindsey because her studies were difficult, and she had a new boyfriend she wanted to spend time with. One day Lindsey's father called to tell her that her grandma had passed away.

The first year in college is exciting whether you're a freshman or a transfer student coming in for the first time. It's the beginning of new relationships when everyone first experiences the excitement of college life. Soon enough, however, classes get tough and some friends are exchanged for other more compatible ones. Then too, one must get good grades, work part-time, or, God forbid, mourn the loss of a beloved family member. Time goes by, and once-close relationships turn into short hellos as students pass each other in the halls. Relationships come and go, especially when there is no soil in which they can take root. This is what happened to Lindsey. When she needed the comfort of a friend, she did not have it because the relationship once established was gone.

How do we establish lasting relationships? First Thessalonians reveals to us the key to true relationships and how to preserve them. Paul and his coworkers provide a great example in how they established a lasting relationship with the Thessalonians. They present the foundation to true godly relationships that will last not just a few weeks but for all of eternity.

The Primary Relationship (1 Thess. 2:3-5)

As an evangelist for Christ, Paul desires all people to have a relationship with the Savior because he knows what it is like to encounter Him. Here Paul affirms that he is in line with God. He says that he is “approved by God,” and he shows the importance of having a relationship with Him. He affirms that he cannot lie. He cannot paint a false picture of what he is because his life is in line with God. God, who is his “witness,” controls his conscience.

In a world where lying is prominent for the purpose of self-gain, Paul's character is a great contrast. He does not live for himself but rather for God's approval. His relationship with God enables him to establish meaningful relationships with those around him.

Godly Motivation Behind Relationships (1 Thess. 2:19, 20)

There is a great contrast between the way the world is motivated to establish its relationships and the model Paul gives to Christians. This relationship is based on hope—the hope that one day we will all meet together at the second coming of Jesus Christ, where it will be confirmed that that relationship will last for eternity. Paul's motivation behind the relationships that he established with people is their salvation and their well-being. Paul is seeking the gain of those around him, and he wants the Thessalonians to feel the joy that comes only through Jesus. Paul, as a minister of Christ, has personally experienced the love of Christ. This experience has driven him to take it to those around him.

Keeping Godly Relationships Strong (1 Thess. 2:3-7)

Most people seek selfish gain. They establish relationships that benefit their own desires. They are manipulative and deceitful, seeking economic stability, pleasure, and popularity.

In his relationship with the Thessalonians, Paul makes sure that they know he is not connecting with them for his own benefit. He is there because he desires their good. He is there because he wants God's will for their lives. He is there because he wants them to be with him at Jesus’ side.

REACT

1. What motives drive you to build relationships?
2. How can you build relationships that will last for eternity?
3. How has your experience with Jesus driven you to build lasting relationships?

Tuesday JULY 10

Testimony “The Value of a True Friend”

Eccles. 4:9-12

Marcos David Torres, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.

"Things will go wrong with every one; sadness and discouragement press every soul; then a personal presence, a friend who will comfort and impart strength, will turn back the darts of the enemy that are aimed to destroy. Christian friends are not half as plentiful as they should be. In hours of temptation, in a crisis, what a value is a true friend! Satan at such times sends along his agents to cause the trembling limbs to stumble; but the true friends who will counsel, who will impart magnetic hopefulness, the calming faith that uplifts the soul—oh, such help is worth more than precious pearls."*

This week we are discussing the topic of preserving relationships. To preserve something means to make sure it lasts. In the context of our study, it
means that we want to build and nourish lasting relationships. The opposite, of course, would be to form shallow relationships that cannot stand the test of time, trials, or obstacles. Sadly, the culture in which many of us live has paved the way for shallow relationships. Our Facebook pages have friend lists that have climbed well over 2,000 people, and yet, how many of us can say of each of them, "They are true friends?"

Nothing is more important than a true friend. "A strong, helpful grasp of the hand of a true friend is worth more than gold and silver." 2 The Bible also affirms this truth by telling us that, "Two are better than one, / Because they have a good reward for their labor. / For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. / But woe to him who is alone when he falls, / For he has no one to help him up. / Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; / But how can one be warm alone? / Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. / And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" 1Eccles. 4:9-12, NKJV.

**REACT**

1. Do you have friends who encourage you to grow closer to Jesus? If not, what steps can you take to ensure that you do?

2. Have you ever been in a situation that was so overwhelming you wished for a friend to help you along? What was that like? Write down some thoughts and share them with your group.

1 Sons and Daughters of God, p. 161.

2 Ibid.

**wednesday JULY 11**

**How-to Staying Together Whatever**

1 Thess. 2:17-3:10

**Richard Floyd McKell, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.**

The entrance of sin into our world created a separation between us and God and between us and our fellow humans. We naturally look for the differences in each other. We compete with each other, hoping to get the upper hand. Sin has programmed us into thinking we don't need each other to live healthy lives. We are inherently selfish, caring only for ourselves.

However, having healthy relationships with fellow believers is vital to our spiritual well-being (Heb. 13:1-3). The devil is personally involved in hindering our relationships (1 Thess. 2:18) because the closer we are to one another, the more we will share our testimonies of God's love (Rev. 12:11). This is why Jesus prayed for all to be one (John 17:20, 21). How do we establish and keep these bonding relationships? Here are a few points to consider:

**Spend time with others on purpose.** Purposefully spending quality time with others is a great way to cultivate better relationships. By spending time together we can learn about and help to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of those in distress.

Spend time socializing. Jesus visited with Zacchaeus in his home (Luke 19:5). He also desired to spend quality time with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (Luke 10:38, 39). And He enjoyed a good wedding feast as much as anybody else (John 2:1, 2).

Be kind and friendly. Keeping a connection with others is important for both giving and receiving help. Communicate. Call, e-mail, text, have face-to-face conversations. Speak kindly (Prov. 15:1). Be polite and friendly (Prov. 18:24).

Encourage each other. Simply saying the words "It will be OK" and showing that you care can lessen the burden of an awful situation. Don't hesitate to share understanding words of comfort both in joy and struggles (Eph. 5:19-21). Pray for each other and with each other (James 5:16).

**REACT**

1. Why do you believe it is so important to communicate and share our problems with others? Are there some problems we should take only to the Lord? Explain your answer.

2. How can unity help us to share the gospel?

3. Why is unity a necessary part of our Christian walk?

**thursday JULY 12**

**Opinion Cheering for the Underdog**

1 Thess. 2:19, 20; 1 Thess. 3:9, 10

**Robert Dabney Jr., Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.**

It would not be difficult to find a group of Christian young people somewhere around the world cheering for a sports team that is predicted to lose. There is something in human nature that causes us to want the little guy to win. We will scream, chant, or do anything we can to help our team find the strength needed to overcome. Yet, in the greatest battle ever fought, there seems to be little cheering for members of what seems to be the minority.

In today's postmodern culture, it seems as if a Christian is the ultimate underdog. Society has obstacles for the young believer to overcome at every turn. From music to television, books to billboards, it appears as if all signs lead to life without a holy God. How can a young Christian prevail? With friendships, good examples, and prayers! We have been commissioned to help one another make it to heaven. We must cheer each other on, encouraging one another to trust in God and His word. We must help one another believe that sin can be overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that as followers of Christ, we actually have the advantage over the powers of the prince of this world.

Like Paul, we should pray for our friends “night and day” that God would “perfect that which is lacking in their faith” (1 Thess. 3:10, NKJV). Our hope and joy should set on seeing those whom God has placed in our life attain victory in Jesus. Nothing is more important than concern for the salvation of others. This concern should be evident through our prayers, thoughts, and deeds.

I ask you today to consider those in your life whom you love and cherish. What would life be without them? What would heaven be without them? What are you doing to ensure that they are a part of the body of Christ? When praying, we tend to think mostly of our salvation. Yet isn't this a bit selfish? We must pray for and encourage others to remain faithful. While we do so, God will work out our issues. We must become the keeper of our brothers and sisters!

**REACT**

In Exodus 32:32, Moses asked God to blot him out instead of the children of Israel. Why? Is this the brotherly love Paul preached about to the
Exploration *The Cord of Three Strands*

**CONCLUDE**

We all acknowledge the importance of having close friends, but we must not forget how vital it is to incorporate Christ into those friendships. Yes, two is better than one, but when you add in the last element—the element of the third cord, which is Jesus—then that bond “is not quickly broken.” Because of that, it is important to intentionally form relationships with those who seek to know Christ as we do. We must look for those who have the same goals and desires that He has placed in us.

**CONSIDER**

- Writing a prayer, asking God to place friends in your path who will bring you closer to Him. Place this prayer in your Bible and pray it often.
- Drawing or painting a picture that depicts the idea of “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Show Christ as being the central cord—the cord that keeps the others together.
- Contacting some friends and starting a Bible study or small discussion group. This will help you not only get to know God better, but it will bring you into fellowship with others who seek some of the same things you do.
- Journaling about friendships that have been the most meaningful to you and listing reasons why you feel those were the relationships that mattered.
- E-mailing or writing a letter to a friend you haven't heard from in a long time to regain contact with him or her. (If you can't think of anyone, pray for the Lord to put someone on your heart. If you pray this, He will certainly answer!)
- Analyzing your closest relationships to find God's role in them. If you do not find that He is a central part of these relationships, then it may be time to adjust some of your priorities!
- Praying for God to place someone in your life who may need a godly friend. Seek to be bound to Him so you may minister and witness to someone else.

**CONNECT**

-Prov. 17:17; Prov. 18:24; Prov. 27:17.

*Sons and Daughters of God, p. 27.*
"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (1 Cor. 9:19, NIV).

Introduction Once in a Lifetime
Rom. 8:18

Kwabena Nimarko, Columbia, Maryland, U.S.A.

Imagine that when you check your e-mail, you notice that you have received an invitation to dine with the President at the White House. Several other individuals in your community are also presented with this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Because you live within an hour's drive of Washington, D.C., the group will be driven there in a limousine. Eagerly you accept the invitation and begin to prepare for this memorable event.

On the day of the dinner, you dress in your best outfit and walk to the designated meeting spot. As you stroll toward the destination, you meet some of your community members who surprisingly mock you because of this privilege. Nonetheless, you continue to focus on your goal. Once on the road, the limo breaks down and causes the passengers to panic. A division occurs among them: some want to walk to the nearest bus station, while others desire to wait for help. In addition, you're all beginning to feel hungry. You hope there is still time to eat dinner with the President.

Finally, you are seated at the President's table.

Frank A. Clark once said, "If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere." At least once in a lifetime, it dawns on us that the road to glory has many hardships that can easily discourage an individual. However, with a focused mind and strength from Jesus Christ, one can overcome. The new converts in Thessalonica experienced many afflictions as they awaited the return of Jesus Christ. Regardless of their painful experiences, they remained faithful. Encouraged by Paul and by one another, they pressed onward.

In this week's lesson, we will learn about Thessalonica in Paul's day: the persecution and challenges the church faced and how they continued to believe, as Paul did, that their suffering was nothing when compared to the glory that would be revealed to them (Rom. 8:18). They endured to "get a crown that will last forever" (1 Cor. 9:25, NIV).


Logos "But Until Then . . .”
1 Thess. 3:12, 13; 1 Thess. 4:16-18

Silas Owusu-Nkwantabisah, College Park, Maryland, U.S.A.

From Paul's two letters to the church in Thessalonica, we discover themes that are applicable to Christians today. In today's lesson, we hope to relate to the church of Thessalonica and to learn from Paul's letters to them how we can also remain true to God's teachings (2 Thess. 2:15). The guiding questions of this study are (1) what challenges did the church in Thessalonica face? and (2) what admonitions to the Thessalonian Christians were to be their guiding rays of hope?

Thessalonica in Paul's Day (1 Thess. 1:4, 7, 10; 1 Pet. 2:9)

The Thessalonian church was of God's own election (1 Thess.1:4) and sanctification (2 Thess. 2:13). This is in keeping with other portions of Scripture. Jesus said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you" (John 15:16, NKJV). Peter wrote to the scattered churches in Asia that they were elected by God (1 Pet. 1:2). We cannot of our own efforts obtain righteousness; but when we believe in His Son, God stands ready to save and preserve us.

The Thessalonian church was exemplary regarding their faith in God (1 Thess. 1:6, 7). The other churches in Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond were encouraged by the church in Thessalonica.

The Thessalonian church was exempt from idolatry to serve the living and true God and to wait for Christ's return (1 Thess. 1:9, 10). The members were mission-driven and filled with the blessed hope of seeing Jesus. Challenges (Matt. 24:21; Acts 17:1-10; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Thess. 2:2-5)

As the sun shines on every person at particular seasons, so, too, does every person face challenges. Although the church of Thessalonica was elected
of God, it faced some severe challenges.

Persecution. Because the sermons of Paul and Silas centered on the crucified Christ and the hope in His resurrection, some Jews rebelled and persecuted the believers. As reported in Acts 17:1-10, this situation was so severe that the church members immediately sent Paul and Silas away so that their lives might be spared. Persecution has always been a great challenge to God's people throughout the ages. Jesus Himself suffered greatly, and He warned that "there will be great tribulation" in the last days (Matt. 24:21, NKJV).

False doctrine. Then as today, the Christians in Thessalonica were vulnerable to misguided theories and theologies. In 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul urges them not to be "alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come" (NIV). He then stresses not to let anyone deceive them regarding certain truths (2 Thess. 3-5). Rather, they are to "test all things; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21, NKJV). Otherwise, their hope of meeting the Lord Jesus when He returns could be thwarted. This is a crucial lesson for us today as we watch the world and nature becoming ever more violent in all possible aspects.

Idleness (1 Thess. 4:11, 12; 2 Thess. 3:11, 12). Perhaps some Christians in the Thessalonian church felt that if Christ was returning soon, there was no point in working. Then there is the fact that some Greeks frowned on manual labor. Whatever the reason, some church members had grown idle. So Paul urged them to work hard and live quietly. This would help them to be a positive force in society.

In the Face of Challenges (1 Cor. 15:58; Titus 2:11-13)
Knowing that the Thessalonian church faced challenges, we shall next explore how Paul encouraged them to address these challenges and to sustain their hope of meeting Jesus.

Pursue godliness (1 Thess. 5:15). Paul urged the church to pursue what is good, both for themselves and for others. This connotes seeking what is good in order to do it and standing firm in the truth. Elaborating on that theme, Paul taught that godliness includes not repaying evil with evil, rejoicing at all times, always being grateful to God, and abstaining from evil. This is what sanctification is all about. Sanctification encompasses the mind, the body, and the spiritual life (1 Thess. 5:23). This is what the law of God is about. It teaches the right way, and with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are able to keep it.

Keep the blessed hope (1 Thess. 4:14, 16-18). When one's hope dies, life is no longer worth living. Therefore, Paul urges the church to believe that Jesus will surely return. We can believe that He will because of His resurrection. In his absence Paul encouraged the Christians in Thessalonica to put their trust in God's providence and protection. Such trust would serve to encourage them to stand firm against false teaching such as the ones being taught about Christ's return.

Stand firm (2 Thess. 2:15). In his absence Paul encouraged the Christians in Thessalonica to put their trust in God's providence and protection. Such trust would serve to encourage them to stand firm against false teaching such as the ones being taught about Christ's return.

Like the new converts in Thessalonica, God's church today patiently awaits Christ's return. But until He does, we, like the Thessalonians, must comfort one another, be firm in God's word, and yield to His sanctifying power.

REACT
1. Identify four major challenges faced by Adventists today that involve growing in Christ. How can each challenge be addressed?
2. What practical things are you doing to further God's cause while you wait for Christ's return?

Testimony Being Each Other's Keeper
1 Thess. 5:11

**Gloria Opoku-Boateng, Laurel, Maryland, U.S.A.**

"God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry."  

Sometimes we forget about this work, or we fall into the trap of thinking that it is only for certain people. Like the people of Thessalonica, we all need to be "Paul or Silas" in each other's lives. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, "Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (NIV).

How do we witness for God? Looking at the life of Paul gives us strategies for witnessing for Him wherever we are. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-27, we see Paul's strategy in witnessing for God. We have to step out of our "comfort zone" and be there for each other, help each other to wait for Christ's second coming, live under the law of God, gain "some" to Christ, be each other's keeper, and pray for each other.

"God helps us to cultivate habits of thought, word, look, and action that will testify to all about us that we have been with Jesus and learned of him."  

We need to pray tirelessly, study the Word of God, and talk about God and His goodness.

In our lives, we "may have the opportunity to tell the poor and ignorant of the wonderful truths of God's word. Improve every such opportunity. The Lord will bless every moment spent in this way."  

**REACT**
1. Does witnessing always have to be done with words? Or can it also be by actions? Explain your answers.
2. How can you, like the Christians in Thessalonica, witness through your lifestyle?
3. Brainstorm at least five ways you could fall into the trap of idleness.
4. Do you think you are going to be held accountable for what you do as you wait for Christ? Explain your answer.

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1 Steps to Christ, p. 79.
3 Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 276.
**1 Thess. 1:6, 7**

*Kelli Wayfa, Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.*

“The city of Thessalonica was founded around 315 B.C. by King Cassander of Macedon, on or near the site of the ancient town of Therma and 26 other local villages.”¹ Cassander named it after his wife Thessalonike, a half-sister of Alexander the Great. Thessaloi-nik-e means the “Thessalian victory.”²

The church in Thessalonica was born out of persecution and was dynamic in its growth. The many cults and cultures in the city made it difficult for Christians to switch their allegiance to the true God. Still, they refused “to participate in the intricate web of local cults that gave sacred legitimization to the empire.”³ The Holy Spirit led them as they proved all truth. Thus, they turned away from idols and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ despite the challenges they faced in doing so.

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess. 1:6, 7, NIV). Paul’s testimony in his letter to the church is evidence of their persevering spirit found in the church of Thessalonica.

However different the circumstances of the Thessalonian church may be from ours, we can still learn from it a lesson of great importance. The letters to the church in Thessalonica serve as a guide to the end-time church. Like them, we also need to learn how to endure, toll, love, hope, and sacrifice.

With the help of the Comforter, we also can be a working and triumphant church. Let us focus on things above rather than on things of the world. Like the Thessalonians, we, too, have a duty to share the gospel to the people around us while we wait for Christ’s return.

**REACT**

1. What daily commitment should you make so that you can live the hope of the Second Coming?

2. What is preventing you from making this commitment?

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**wednesday JULY 18**

**How-to Waiting for Christ's Return**

*1 John 2:15-17*

*Elizabeth Adeau, Owings Mills, Maryland, U.S.A.*

The Thessalonian Christians were weary from trials and disappointed that Christ had not yet returned. So Paul wrote to them, commending them on their good works and encouraging them to remain faithful. Like the Thessalonians, we also have struggles while we wait for Christ’s return.

Crime, disease, and political unrest abound. Every day seems to bring natural disasters, economic crises, and the loss of loved ones. All of this causes us to long for the Second Coming. Yet even as we do so, we are often distracted by the things of this world. We are tempted to satisfy our worldly cravings and take pride in our achievements, forgetting that we must focus instead on Christ so we will be ready for His return.

What should we do while we look forward to Christ’s second coming?

*Be faithful to God’s Word (Ps. 119:105).* Scripture is our guide through life. We can only know the truth if we study it diligently. Paul warned of the great apostasy that would come. It is through a deep knowledge of and obedience to the Scriptures that we will be safe from this apostasy.

*Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).* We cannot overcome this world without prayer. Prayer keeps us connected to God. Since we cannot trust ourselves to overcome this world, we need to rely on Jesus to help us overcome. We must pray at all times so that we will not fall into temptation.

*Encourage one another (1 Thess. 4:3-16-18).* Let us remind one another of God’s love and promises. Let us also encourage one another to be faithful until the end. Let us not despair when those in the faith die. Instead, let us remember that at the sound of the trumpet they shall arise to meet Christ.

*LIVE a godly life (1 Thess. 4:3-12; Titus 2:11-14).* As we await Christ’s return, His character is to be perfected in us. We must allow the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds. When Christ’s character is perfected in us, we will be ready to spend eternity with Him.

**REACT**

1. What are some things you are doing that keep you from preparing for Christ’s return?

2. What can you do that will help you to prepare for the Second Coming?

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**thursday JULY 19**

**Opinion Receiving the Holy Spirit**

*John 3:1-10*

*Kwabena Yamoah, Columbia, Maryland, U.S.A.*

The Christians in Thessalonica were dear to Paul’s heart. He prayed for them day and night that they might be deeply rooted in the faith. They faithfully accepted Paul’s message. They experienced true conversion, a transformation that can be wrought only from above. It is therefore no surprise that they became living examples for all the believers in the region of Macedonia. They were eager to advance the gospel, just as Paul was.

We may not consider ourselves to be new converts, but perhaps we have yet to experience that true transformation experienced by the Thessalonians—the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, NKJV). Where is that Spirit which past generations of Christians possessed, the Spirit who enabled them to advance the gospel? Are we slumbering even though we know that soon our Savior will appear in glory? Let us earnestly ask God to create in us new hearts that will help us to lovingly do God’s will.
Still, the Thessalonians were prone to lose their focus on Jesus. Paul therefore urged them not to be satisfied with what they had attained, but to increase in all that is good. Many times when we experience true repentance, we think we are immune to sin. This causes us to lose focus. We begin to pray and to study less. Let Paul's admonishments to the Christians in Thessalonica serve as warnings to us also.

The closer we draw to Jesus, the more we realize our imperfections. He longs to make us white as snow. So let us endeavor to have an ongoing personal relationship with Him. Then our characters will begin to reflect His, and our lives will serve as a testimony to others; and because of the living fire that dwells within us, we will look for opportunities to share the good news with our friends, neighbors, classmates, coworkers, and professors.

**REACT**

1. What causes us to cease focusing on Christ? What happens when we do so? How can we stay focused on Him until He returns?

2. How often do you desire to share your faith with the people around you?

**friday JULY 20**

**Exploration A Living Example**

1 Thessalonians 5

*Stephanie Yamniuk, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

**CONCLUDE**

In Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, he acknowledges the many challenges they must overcome through their faith in Christ and the salvation He has promised. The church in Thessalonica faced persecution and was threatened by false doctrine and false prophets. Paul urged the church to reflect the principles taught by Christ: live peacefully with one another, encourage one another, and spend time helping the weak and less fortunate. He reminded them of the importance of focusing on Christ, spending time in prayer, reading Scripture. By using our time in these ways, we also can actively reflect Christ to the people with whom we work and spend time.

**CONSIDER**

- Organizing a prayer circle with your youth group or church. Pray that the faith of your church members will increase.
- Gathering a group of friends to conduct an afternoon program at a local home. Take time after the program to talk with the seniors about what God has done for you. Have them share how God has led in their lives.
- Producing a video about how to live a Christian life in the "real world" and how not to give in to false prophets and false doctrines. Post it on YouTube.
- Spending time in God's nature. What does the natural environment teach you about God? How can you reflect these teachings to others when you go about your daily activities?
- Baking a nutritious treat and bringing it to someone to whom you have been witnessing. Spend the time together eating and fellowshipping. Pray for an opportunity to share your faith.
- Singing a song for church, writing a poem for your church or school newsletter, or finding another way to express joy over what God is doing in your life.
- Planning a panel discussion with your church or youth group to discuss what false doctrines are being presented to young people today, and what our role as Seventh-day Adventists can be to present the truth.

**CONNECT**

1 Thess. 4:14-18; 2 Thess. 2:2-5, 15; 1 John 2:15-17.

Lesson four July 21-27

Joyous and Thankful

“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 Thess. 1:2, 3, ESV).

Sabbath July 21

Introduction Refocused . . .

1 Thess. 1:1—5

Karen Holford, Auchtermuchty, Scotland

I’m writing to a deadline and trying to stay on task. However, my concentration lapses regularly and my eyes flicker along the row of application icons at the bottom of my laptop screen. They sit like a row of tempting candies in a box. Click. Message: “Hi, Hannah, can I meet you for lunch on Thursday?”

I’m helping to write a book about the Second Coming. Hopefully it will engage a curious, disbelieving, and self-centered generation. It’s meant to be an exciting project. However, it’s taking a long time, and I’m losing the energy for it. Click.

“The earthquake in Japan has been one of the strongest on record. The nuclear reactor’s safety system has malfunctioned. More than a thousand people are unaccounted for.”

I begin to type again.

The world can’t last much longer. It’s impossible to ignore how vulnerable we are. God loves us, and He has a plan.

An e-mail flickers into my inbox. Maybe there’s a sale at my favorite store. Click. Oh, an e-mail from Paul. It’s been a while since I heard from him. Wonder if he’ll help me with this book. Click.

“My dearest child, I can’t stop thanking and praising God for you! Do you know that I mention you by name in my prayers every day? It’s so exciting for me to know that you passionately believe in this project, and that you’re still working on it. I have no doubt it’s one of the hardest assignments you’ve ever had. But your work is inspired by your love for God, and for the people around you who still don’t have the hope you have—that Jesus will return soon.

“I want you to know that I have faith in you, because I love you. I’ve watched you grow, and I know you will never lose your faith in God.

“You wondered about the deadline. Well, I don’t know the date, either. It’s an ongoing project—a lifetime’s work. Trust God to inspire you, and He will prepare you for His own deadline. He’s weaving us all into this earthshaking project in different ways.”

Paul’s encouragement refocuses me on what’s most important. I disconnect my laptop from the Internet, hide the application bar, and return with fresh energy to the most important work of my life.

Sunday July 22

Evidence Good Results

1 Thess. 1:1-10

Filip Bajic, Galston, East Ayrshire, United Kingdom

Teachers know that nothing motivates a student more than a reward for good work or behavior. I imagine that was what the Thessalonians felt like when they started reading the letter written by Paul, Silas (Silvanus), and Timothy.

In Acts 17:1-9 we find that they went to Thessalonica, where they debated with the Jews for three consecutive Sabbaths. Many of them, along with many Greeks, became Christians (Acts 17:4).

Therefore, Paul, Silas, and now Timothy were thankful for the way the new “church plant” in Thessalonica had developed. Paul thanks God for their faith, love, and hope, which resonated throughout the whole Christian world of that time. The good fruits we bear are a result of God’s work in us, not a result of our own work or our pastor’s work.

What kind of faith, love, and hope is Paul talking about? He describes them as “your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:3, NKJV). Did Paul, who in many places contrasted salvation by faith and salvation by works, just say “work of faith”? Leon Morris says that “while Paul insists that salvation is all of God, he also insists that faith is busy.”

“Labor of love” means more than just a few acts of kindness here and there. The Greek word for “labor” (kopos) denotes a continuous striving and hardship for the sake of love. The Greek word we translate as “love” is agape, which is a love that comes only from God and seeks to give, irrespective
of someone's value. This kind of love challenges our human nature. Finally, the "patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" is a hope directed toward Christ's second coming. In 1 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul writes that their faith became so well known in many places that he, Silas, and Timothy didn't need to say anything. Actions really do speak louder than words!

**REACT**

1. Would Paul be joyous and thankful if he visited your church?

2. What would be some modern examples of a "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope"?

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**monday JULY 23**

**Logos Grounds for Gratitude**

Dan. 12:2; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Gal. 5:19-23; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 1 Tim. 1:15

**Bernie Holford, Auchtermuchty, Scotland**

**Because It's Only Right! (1 Thess. 1:3; 1 Cor. 13:13)**

Paul has some challenging things he wants to say to the Thessalonians, but he knows he needs to connect with them first by encouraging them and appreciating them. Knowing that he delights in them will make it easier for them to listen to the tough words that will come later in his letter. He wants them to know that whatever messes they are getting themselves into, they still bring him joy.

Paul wisely takes a huge step back from his inspection of their mistakes to see the long view. Yes, corrections need to be made; but they are on the right track, and that is the most important thing. His joy comes from knowing that the "babies" he brought to Christ are maturing into faithful and loving believers. They have come a long way spiritually, and he knows it is only right to thank God for their growth (2 Thess. 1:3, 4). Paul is specifically thankful for their faith, hope, and love—a closely linked collection of concepts that he believes are at the heart of the Christian life.

Each Thessalonian believer can visualize the delight on Paul's face as the letter is read aloud. Moreover, each Thessalonian believer knows that whatever Paul needs to say, it is because he loves them.

**Because God Is Working Things Out (Matt. 5:3-12; Rom. 8:28; 1 Thess. 5:16-18)**

In God's kingdom, happiness is discovered in unexpected places. Happiness is not about what we have, who we are, where we are, what we do, or even what is happening to us. God's gift of happiness transcends the painful and challenging circumstances we face. At the heart of happiness is the security we have in God's infinite love for us. He works for the good of everyone who loves Him (and also for those who do not).

Knowing that God cares about every aspect of our lives gives us happiness as a solid foundation. His everlasting compassion gives us a different perspective on life. It's not about what's happening to us right now. Instead, it's about how God is using what's happening to help us grow into His likeness.

**Because God's Spirit Is Transformational (Gal. 5:19-23; 1 Thess. 1:9)**

The believers in Thessalonica knew all too well what it meant to live an idol-worshiping life (1 Thess. 1:9). They knew it wasn't a happy place to be. (Gal. 5:19-21). People are still searching for happiness in the selfish experiences of sexual immorality, financial and material greed, ambition, orgies, drugs, and alcohol. When the Holy Spirit fills our lives, we discover that authentic happiness comes from unselfishly using our spiritual gifts to help others experience the depths and heights of God's love. We experience happiness when we treat people with kindness and respect. Conflicts are transformed through peace-making. Irritations and annoyances are transformed by patience. Addictions and anger are overcome by self-control; and hatred and violence are dissolved by love.

**Because Faith Changes Everything (1 Thess. 1:4, 5; 1 Tim. 1:15)**

There is probably no happier experience than realizing that God loves and accepts us just the way we are, even when we are the very worst of sinners. His forgiveness invites us to respond by loving Him and believing in Him. Having lived an idol-worshiping life, the Thessalonians may have felt like the worst sinners ever. Faith in an accepting, loving, and forgiving God continually sets us free from our past mistakes. The Thessalonians' unswerving faith in God's love and forgiveness, along with the power of the Holy Spirit, would help them adjust to the changes that needed to be made as Paul revealed more of God's will for them.

**Because Hope Is Alive (Dan. 12:2; 1 Thess. 1:8-10)**

Hope naturally follows when we have faith in God and believe in His promises. We have nothing to fear for the future because we know that death is not the end of everything. In fact, our resurrection from death is really just the beginning of a completely new life experience. The Thessalonian believers had a vibrant trust in Jesus' second coming. This trust was famous among other believers. Their daily lives were shaped by their hope in the promise of the resurrection and a future life in heaven.

**Because Love Is at Work (1 Thess. 1:3; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13)**

Paul knew that God's love was the force behind the ministry of the Thessalonian church. Loving God helped them to love others. When our hearts are full from our experience with God's love, then His love will overflow from our lives into the lives of others. First Corinthians 13 describes God's love for us, the love we need to experience from Him so we can live it in our relationships with each other, for "the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13, NIV).

**REACT**

1. What difference would it make if we openly praised and thanked God for the faith, hope, and love of our fellow Christians?

2. Paul said that faith, hope, and love are important and that love was the most important of the three. How do faith, hope, and love interact and support each other in your life?

3. If Paul wrote a letter to you, what aspects of your faith, hope, and love would inspire his joy and thankfulness?

**tuesday JULY 24**

**Testimony Filled and Inspired**
1 Thess. 1:8

Obinna Iheoma, Dumbarton, Scotland

"Dwell upon the good qualities of those with whom you associate, and see as little as possible of their errors and failings. When tempted to complain of what some one has said or done, praise something in that person's life or character. Cultivate thankfulness. Praise God for His wonderful love in giving Christ to die for us. It never pays to think of our grievances. God calls upon us to think of His mercy and His matchless love, that we may be inspired with praise."1

"It is faith that enables us to look beyond the present, with its burdens and cares, to the great hereafter, where all that now perplexes us shall be made plain. Faith sees Jesus standing as our Mediator at the right hand of God. Faith beholds the mansions that Christ has gone to prepare for those who love Him. Faith sees the robe and crown prepared for the overcomer, and hears the song of the redeemed. . . . Faith is not feeling. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."2

"The Spirit recreates, refines, and sanctifies human beings, fitting them to become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. . . . The fruit of the Spirit is 'love,' not hatred; 'joy,' not discontent and mourning; 'peace,' not irritation, anxiety, and manufactured trials. It is 'long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.'"3

"What was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost? The glad tidings of a risen Savior were carried to the uttermost parts of the inhabited world. As the disciples proclaimed the message of redeeming grace, hearts yielded to the power of this message. The church beheld converts flocking to her from all directions. Backsliders were reconverted. Sinners united with believers in seeking the pearl of great price. Some who had been the bitterest opponents of the gospel became its champions. The prophecy was fulfilled, 'He that is feeble . . . shall be as David; and the house of David . . . as the angel of the Lord.' Zechariah 12:8. Every Christian saw in his brother a revelation of divine love and benevolence. One interest prevailed; one subject of emulation swallowed up all others. The ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ's character and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom."4

1 Gospel Workers, p. 479.
2 Ibid., pp. 259, 260.
3 Ibid., p. 287.

Wednesday July 25

How-to Wholesome and Complete

Gal. 5:22, 23

Elizabeth Iheoma, Dumbarton, Scotland

An orange is not complete without its peel. Neither would it be complete if there were segments missing from it. For the orange to reach a state of completeness, the missing segments would need to be restored and wrapped in the peel. Paul encourages the early Christians toward a life of wholeness by pointing them to the segments of the fruit of the Spirit: the gift of Jesus' character given through the Holy Spirit, wrapped in love. Paul is also quick to thank God for the commitment seen in the Thessalonians as they put their faith, love, and hope into action. Sin has distorted the idea of perfection and completeness by making us believe that they are impossible to achieve.

By considering these following segments of the Spirit, we can ensure that our Christian journey will be a wholesome and joyful experience:

Surrender: Being a complete person in Christ requires us to surrender and accept the gift of the Spirit. God has promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:13).

Be thankful. Develop an attitude of gratitude. We sometimes spend too much time dwelling on our weaknesses and what we do not have. Instead, we should focus on our strengths and thank God for the skills and abilities He has given us, as well as the strengths of those around us.

Be loving. Our motivation to serve others should be our love for Christ. When He was on earth He expressed His love for others by meeting their needs (Matt. 20:28). We also should express our love by meeting the needs of those around us.

Be optimistic. This does not mean we should deny that problems exist. Rather it is taking on a challenge, knowing that there will be a positive outcome, and believing that things will work out well (Rom. 8:28).

React

1. What are some things God has promised to do for us? How can these promises help us to be wholesome Christians?
2. What divine provision has God given to us to overcome our weaknesses?

This article is based in part on material from the following book: Jim Hartness and Neil Eskelin, The 24-Hour Turn-Around: Discovering the Power to Change (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell Co. Pub., 1993), pp. 48-50.

Thursday July 26

Opinion Joy Equals Freedom

Gal. 5:19–23

Taylor N. Bajic, Galston, East Ayrshire, United Kingdom

While on earth, Christ taught us how to live according to His law and grace. We cannot help but be joyful in His promises. Yet, being joyful on a daily basis is not easy. Usually, we are regretting what has happened in our past or worrying about our future. We forget that life is now and that it is full of wonderful surprises and blessings that God is longing to share with us. We must live in the present. It is a gift.

When we make the choice to live according to the fruit of the Spirit, we will be living the way God intended—in peace and harmony with one another. Our lives will be glowing witnesses of what Christ has done in and for us, because true joy comes only from Him. Joy is a choice. It certainly can be a difficult one in the face of tragedy, heartache, and stress, but if we ask God to fill us with His joy, He will surprise us. When we have joy in our hearts, kindled by who Christ is, we are more open to His work in our lives. We are better able to appreciate life for its ups and downs. We will be much less likely to miss the beautiful things and rich opportunities that are fresh each morning. Focusing on the negative only drives us deeper into a pit.
Life on earth is not fair, but we can choose to live in the present, taking everything in stride with faith, love, and thankfulness. Doing so will determine our happiness. It takes practice, but God is ready to help. He knows exactly what we need. Max Lucado writes, “I choose joy . . . I will invite my God to be the God of circumstance. I will refuse the temptation to be cynical . . . the tool of the lazy thinker. I will refuse to see people as anything less than human beings, created by God. I will refuse to see any problem as anything less than an opportunity to see God.”

Joy frees us. Be free.

**REACT**

1. In what ways has God given you reason to be joyful?

2. What practical things can you do on a daily basis to focus on God and the positive things in life?

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**friday JULY 27**

**Exploration Choosing Thankfulness and Joy**

*Ps. 16:11*

*Renee Coffee, Gobles, Michigan, U.S.A.*

**CONCLUDE**

When author Hal Urban was in college, one of his classmates was Bruce Diaso. Bruce had been paralyzed by polio when he was a senior in high school. He could move only his head and his hands (but not his arms). Instead of feeling sorry for himself, he decided to be thankful for what he did have—God, his family, his church, friends, the university, his teachers, a good mind, and a life full of opportunities. Bruce graduated with honors and became an attorney, but he died when he was only 31 years old. Hal never forgot Bruce, whom he considers to be the most positive person he’s ever met. Since 1972 Hal has presented to his audiences what he calls The Bruce Diaso Challenge—to go through a whole day without complaining about anything. Of the over 80,000 people who have heard the challenge, only five have been successful. Staying positive isn’t easy. But as Christians we can—and should be—the most joyful, positive people on earth. “To honor Christ, to become like Him, to work for Him, is the life’s highest ambition and its greatest joy.” The apostle Paul learned the true secret living a joyful life. And so can we.

**CONSIDER**

- Creating a bulletin board for your church, dorm, or youth room on the subject of thankfulness.
- Writing down each day at least ten different things for which you are thankful. Try to do this for a whole week without writing the same thing twice.
- Researching the topic of joy, using a concordance or a topical Bible.
- Reminding yourself of all you have to be thankful for by helping out at a homeless shelter, nursing home, or a facility for troubled youth.
- Sharing with others a difficult experience you went through that became a blessing in disguise.
- Accepting the Bruce Diaso Challenge and going a whole day without complaining.

**CONNECT**


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*Education, p. 297.*
lesson five JULY 28-AUGUST 3

The Apostolic Example

“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 Thess. 2:4, ESV).

sabbath JULY 28

Introduction You Were Made for a Mission!

1 Thess. 2:4

Rheyda P. Hinlo, Muntinlupa City, Philippines

One of the most popular space missions was the Apollo 11 mission, whose goal was to land two men on the moon's surface and to return them safely to earth. The television broadcast of Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin walking on the moon in 1969 was seen by millions the world over. When they returned to earth, the mission was hailed a success.

You also have a mission. The crew of Apollo 11 was commissioned by men like themselves, but there is no doubt that they took the mission seriously and did their best to succeed. How much more, then, should we take our mission seriously, given that our task comes not from mortal men but from our Creator Father.

In the same way that Jesus' twelve apostles were sent to fulfill a mission, we, too, are appointed by Him to serve a purpose. The word apostle is defined as one sent on a mission. We are all Christ’s apostles, and we share in the commission to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded us to do (Matt. 28:19, 20). As the Father sent Jesus to be the light of the world, so He sends us (John 20:21).

We are all called to be apostles. God left us with plenty of examples in the Bible to show us how we can serve Him faithfully. He equipped each of us with different talents, and when we find the outlet where we can use our talents to glorify Him and further His kingdom, then that outlet becomes our ministry. At the heart of this ministry should be our sole desire to please God (1 Thess. 2:4). There will be times when we'll encounter hardship and resistance. Nevertheless, like the apostle Paul, we should press on, using our love for God and our desire to please Him as our main motivators. As you read this week’s lesson, I invite you to discover practical ways of fulfilling your heavenly mission by becoming a faithful apostle. Just like any other mission, it will require dedication and much work. However, if you fully embrace your mission, you will experience a great adventure and you will receive an even greater reward from our loving Father in heaven.


sunday JULY 29


Deut. 10:16; Ps. 51:1-10; Luke 11:11-13; Acts 16:1-40; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:1-12

Bongga L. Agno, Muntinlupa City, Philippines

Parents often tell their children what to do and what not to do. This is one way of guiding their children and helping them to be disciplined. However, sometimes parents tell their children not to do things that they themselves are doing. In such cases, the children will often let their parents know that they are aware of their parents' hypocrisy. In his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul shared with them, and ultimately with us, how to be an apostle of Christ.

At one time, Paul had determined to extinguish Christianity, but after he met Christ on the road to Damascus, he devoted his life for God's cause.

A Circumcised Heart (Deut. 10:16)

When God promised Abraham that he would be the “father of many nations,” the covenant of circumcision was established. Circumcision was to be a sign of God's special relationship with the Israelites (Gen. 17:10, 11). In Paul's time, circumcision was used by the Jews to discriminate against the Gentiles. They incorrectly believed that circumcision was more crucial to salvation than Christ's sacrifice. These Jews failed to understand that what really matters is the “circumcision of the heart” (Rom. 2:29). “It is not important if a man is circumcised or uncircumcised. The important thing is being the new people God has made” (Gal. 6:15, NCV). “When we are in Christ Jesus, it is not important if we are circumcised or not. The important thing is faith—the kind of faith that works through love” (Gal. 5:6, NCV). Notice in this last verse that obedience occurs as a result of the faith we have in Christ and His grace.

A Contrite Heart (Ps. 51:1-10)

When David learned that he had impregnated Bathsheba, he had her husband Uriah killed. Then God sent Nathan to rebuke him. David was quick to acknowledge that he had sinned. He asked for God's mercy and compassion (Ps. 51:1). Time and again, we all sin against God. Then we must
confess our sins and repent of them in order to obtain God's pardon. Like David, we must ask God to create in us a pure heart (Ps. 51:10).

A Trusting Heart (Luke 11:11-13)

A Christian growing in faith gradually develops the virtue of trusting God at all times, even in dire circumstances. Such virtue is not developed overnight, and it can only be cultivated through hardship. Wholehearted trust in God requires total submission to His will. Earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children. But our heavenly Father is even more willing than that to give us the Holy Spirit when we ask Him for it (Luke 11:13).

A Persevering Heart (Acts 16:1-40)

Timothy and Silas joined Paul on his missionary journeys. They traveled extensively, preaching the gospel and converting many. But they also experienced hardship. The owner of a spirit-possessed slave girl whom Paul healed had Paul and Silas thrown in prison. But before that, they were publicly humiliated, stripped, and beaten. Yet even while they were in the deepest recesses of jail with their feet pinned in stocks, they prayed and sang hymns (Acts 16:25). What an exemplary faith! Being an apostle of God is not a "walk in the park." Opposition is inevitable. Nevertheless, we have confidence that God is with us even in the darkest hours.

A Generous Heart (2 Cor. 8:1-5)

Paul commended the Macedonian churches for their generosity. Though undergoing severe trial and poverty, they "gave as much as they were able and even more than they could afford" (2 Cor. 8:3, NCV). We should not be tight-fisted when it comes to how we use our God-given talents. Paul reminds us that we should excel in the grace of giving (2 Cor. 8:7). God prefers a humble, cheerful giver over a pompous, self-righteous one.

Living to Please God (1 Thess. 2:1-12)

Paul made it clear that he and his cohorts were trying to please God instead of people (1 Thess. 2:4). Despite the hardship the apostles encountered while proclaiming the gospel, they continued on. They could have employed flattery or trickery to gain human approval and avoid persecution. However, they well knew that God tests the hearts of those who work for Him. He searches the recesses of the heart to see if a person is truly dedicated or is being influenced by improper motives. Thus, it is important for an apostle to be transparent in everything he or she does. Heaven has no place for people who profess to be Christians but who are Christian in name only. So let us be like Paul—"dyed in the wool" apostles of Christ.

REACT

1. How should we treat nominal Christians?
2. Why is it hard to "walk the talk"?
3. Why does it seem to be so easy to criticize and pass judgment on pastors?

monday JULY 30

Testimony Praise God Still in Times of Troubles

James 1:2-4

Pauline S. Cochongco, Muntinlupa City, Philippines

"The people of God will not be free from suffering; but while persecuted and distressed, while they endure privation and suffer for want of food they will not be left to perish. That God who cared for Elijah will not pass by one of His self-sacrificing children. He who numbers the hairs of their head will care for them, and in time of famine they shall be satisfied. While the wicked are dying from hunger and pestilence, angels will shield the righteous and supply their wants. To him that 'walketh righteously' is the promise: 'Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.' 'When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.' "

We know that no one is exempt from problems. The good news is nothing is impossible with our Lord. We just have to keep our faith in Him at all times. He's always ready to help us no matter what dangers come our way. As followers of Christ, we should not be fearful because we know He will walk by our side in times of suffering and persecution. Learning to trust Him prepares us for His second coming.

The living righteous are changed 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Angels 'gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.' Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers' arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God.

REACT

1. How can we overcome fear during the time of tribulation?
2. How can we prepare others to be ready for Christ's second coming?

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1 The Great Controversy, p. 629.
2 Ibid., p. 645.

tuesday JULY 31

Evidence Paul's Love Letters

2 Thess. 2:8

Samuel D. Bagane Jr., Muntinlupa City, Philippines

During Paul's time, Thessalonica was the capital of the second division of Macedonia. Paul wrote two letters to the saints living there. In these letters, he stressed how much he wanted to return to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:17, 18). However, Satan prevented him from doing so. Yet even though Paul was physically absent, his letters inspired the Thessalonians and instructed them in how to live a Christian life despite many tribulations.

Paul traveled to many different places, but like a mother caring for her child, he always kept up with what was happening to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:7). He also sent Timothy to Thessalonica to determine the spiritual condition of the members and to strengthen and encourage them (1 Thess. 3:5). When Paul heard the good news that the Thessalonians remained faithful, what joy he felt in his heart! (1 Thess. 3:6-8).

Paul's ministry was more than just sharing the gospel; he also shared his life (1 Thess. 2:8). The apostle showed us that Jesus' gospel is a message
of love expressed in both words and actions. When you read his letters, they appear to be as love letters for a long-lost loved one. That is how excited he was to see them—and the church felt the same way, for they knew of his love for them. This is the same love that our Creator gave us as His children (Luke 11:11-13). Imagine how much sorrow God felt when we were lost, how much happiness He feels if we return. It would be a great blessing if we return to God as His servant.

Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. We are cleansed from our iniquities through His precious blood. With this knowledge, the joy and happiness that we feel should not be confined to ourselves alone but rather shared with others, just as Paul and the apostles did during their time.

REACT
1. Is it enough for us to know that we are saved? Discuss.
2. How do you feel about the idea of showing your love to a stranger? What does the Bible tell us?
3. Can your relatives and friends who are nonbelievers see Jesus in you? If yes, in what way?

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**wednesday AUGUST 1**

**How-to Becoming an Apostle for Christ**

Acts 16:25-28; 1 Thess. 2:1-9

Lizel M. Bobadilla, Cuenca, Batangas, Philippines

Paul had not witnessed Christ's crucifixion. He was not one of the original twelve apostles. He had several experiences that could have weakened his physical and spiritual vigor. Yet his passion for sharing the gospel remained strong. As a follower of Christ, what characteristics did Paul allow the Holy Spirit to develop in him?

A deep longing for the salvation of others. Paul knew that the life of an unbeliever is as significant as the life of a believer. While imprisoned for his faith (Acts 16:25-28), Paul had the option of letting the jailer take his own life so he and Silas could escape. However, he proved that his enemy's eternal salvation was far more important to him than his own freedom.

As modern apostles for Christ, we should never forget that He died for the salvation of every soul. When you encounter an unlovable person, remember that this person's salvation is important to Christ. Therefore, it also should be important to you.

A sensitivity toward others. Paul circumcised Timothy, not because it was a prerequisite to salvation, but because he respected what was important to the people with whom he wanted to share the gospel (Acts 16:3). Also, Paul worked not just to earn a living for himself but to be sure he would not be a burden to others (1 Thess. 2:9). He showed gentleness, so that he could share the gospel of Christ and his personal testimony (1 Thess. 2:6-9).

As apostles for Christ, we should remember that the message of salvation is powerless if we are not sensitively connected to the people to whom we are witnessing.

A focus on pleasing God rather than men. Paul intimately knew the God he served. His priority was to do the work that pleased Him (1 Thess. 2:4). Sufferings and insults, instead of praises and thanks from men, should not matter to us.

Like Paul, no praises from men should ever replace the joy of knowing that the Creator and Savior is pleased with our work of bringing others to Him.

REACT
1. Do you think it can ever come to a point when a person will eventually get tired of pleasing God? Why or why not?
2. Why is sensitivity and gentleness important to witnessing?

**thursday AUGUST 2**

**Opinion Straighten Out Your Life Before It's Too Late**

2 Cor. 3:2, 3

Mark Aaron S. Cochongco, Muntinlupa City, Philippines

In today's world, we must acknowledge that no matter how much we want to live for Christ, Satan will be looking for ways to lead us astray. Only an intimate knowledge of God's Word can keep us on track. As His children, let us work diligently to spread the gospel. Let us be vigilant so that we can be victorious.

Let us also be an example to the people around us. Let our lives be as letters to be read by everyone we know and meet (2 Cor. 3:2, 3). One of the best ways to witness is for people to see Christ's character shining through us. Let us be living sermons of faith and righteousness as the Holy Spirit cultivates His fruit in us (Gal. 5:22, 23).

Part of Satan's strategy includes targeting young people, the future leaders of the church. He will use every temptation and deception to lead them away from Christ. It is always sad when young adults choose the road to destruction rather than the path to heaven. For them, their heaven is the earthly, materialistic lifestyle that will vanish the instant Christ returns.

Our God is a loving God who gave His all to keep us on the right path. He wants all of us to be saved and to live with Him in heaven. If you haven't already, won't you accept right now His invitation to follow Him? Time is of the essence, and refusing God's invitation is the biggest mistake any of us could ever make. I pray that we will all continue to open our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit and make Jesus first in our lives.

REACT
1. What should a person do to overcome the temptations of the devil?
2. Think of ways a person can maintain a close relationship with Jesus. Choose two or three of these ways to practice throughout each day.

**friday AUGUST 3**
**Exploration “Discipleship Mission”**

*John 16:33*

**Christy Yingling Gusse, Conroe, Texas, U.S.A.**

**CONCLUDE**

God asks us to be His disciples, to tell the world about the gift of salvation. He never said life would be problem free, though. In fact, Jesus warned His twelve disciples before sending them out to witness that “in this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33, NIV). But He also said, “But take heart! I have overcome the world.” The Holy Spirit will fill in the areas where we are weak. He will give us God's strength so we can uplift Jesus' name through our lives and bring as many people as possible into His kingdom.

**CONSIDER**

- Getting a small group together to pray. Pray specifically that you will receive whatever you need from God to witness to those in your sphere of influence who do not have a relationship with Him.
- Setting goals for your own spiritual walk with God and how you want Him to help you reach others. For example, you could ask that He would help you talk to one random person each week about Him.
- Thinking and praying about the difficulties you have faced in serving God and how He has led you through those challenges.
- Discussing with your friends the following questions: In what ways do you try to please others? Are those ways beneficial or harmful? How have those ways prevented you from serving God?
- Observing something in nature. What can you learn about discipleship and service from your observations? (If you live in a large city where it it might be difficult to observe nature, research on the Internet something about nature that interests you.)
- Browsing through the section “Mission of the Church” in the Seventhday Adventist Hymnal (nos. 355-375). Choose a hymn to sing or play, paying close attention to the words and how the hymn relates to this week’s lesson.

**CONNECT**

**lesson six AUGUST 4-10**

**Friends Forever**

"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 Thess. 3:13, NIV).

**sabbath AUGUST 4**

**Introduction How Far Until the End?**

1 Thess. 3:13

*Kamarie Manning, Tortola, British Virgin Islands*

Kiah lay in bed, tired from her day's work. Yet all she could do was reflect on the trials she was facing. It had been six weeks since she had applied for a new job, but no answer had been forthcoming. She was having problems on her current job because she was a Christian, so she was eagerly hoping for a new job.

Kiah had always been taught to blend in with her coworkers. However, doing so in her current position would cause her to turn her eyes away from God and His promises. The only thing that kept her going was the encouragement she received from her family and friends. She knew she could count on them whenever she became disheartened.

As Christians, we will be persecuted. We should, however, remember that we have God on our side and that with Him all things are possible. We must be confident that we will receive what He has promised to give us. He has sealed this promise by sending us His own Son to die for our sins. This is our strength that enables us to endure.

The Thessalonians were also faced with hardships, but Paul shared with them a message of hope. This message is for us as well. Yes, living by God's principles would bring persecution. However, we must remain fixed on what matters most. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to remain righteous so they could enter God's kingdom. He wrote to them, "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 Thess. 3:13, NIV*). These words of encouragement urged the Thessalonian church to focus on what matters most.

As you study this week's lesson, remember that God has promised us the greatest thing we could ever receive from anyone. He has promised us the Second Coming. "The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (*1 Thess. 4:16, NIV*).

**sunday AUGUST 5**

**Evidence The Persecuted Thessalonians**

1 Thess. 2:13-19

*Tim Lale, Boise, Idaho, U.S.A.*

Paul compares the plight of the Thessalonian church members with that of the Jewish Christians in Palestine. While the circumstantial reasons for his comparison are unknown, he seems to be pointing to the parallels between the persecution of church members in Palestine at the hands of zealous Jews and the Thessalonian believers' torment from Gentiles who were goaded by the same type of anti-Christian Jews. The Palestinian Christians had held fast in faith. “You should hold on in the same way,” Paul is telling the Thessalonians.

Many of the Thessalonian Christians had been Jewish converts before they heard the gospel message. At their first encounter with Paul, they must have wondered why he and his message stirred such a hate-filled response from fellow Jews. In spite of the dissonance this must have caused, they accepted the truth about Jesus. Subsequently they suffered the same kind of oppression as Paul and most other Christians faced.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that fierce opposition to Christianity made sense when they considered the source—it was the very same people who killed Jesus. The oppressors were envious of the advance of Christianity and considered it an illegitimate rival to be eradicated. Their malice had its origin in the mindset of their forefathers, who had killed the prophets of God in order to silence them.

Paul's love and concern for the church members are evident. However, his response to the Jewish persecutors tells them something just as important. Paul did not treat the Jews the way they treated everybody else. They hated every type of person who wasn't just like them. In contrast, Paul was filled with concern for every person who did not know Jesus. He said, “They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last” (*1 Thess. 2:15, 16*). In other words, God was taking care of the problem, and Paul did not need to hate anyone in thought, word, or deed.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians gave them the proper grounding for having a steady faith in Jesus, regardless of the source, length, or intensity of the persecution they would inevitably go through.
**monday AUGUST 6**

**Logos Being Strong, Blameless, and Holy**

**1 Thessalonians 2:13—3:13**

*Abigail Harewood, Tortola, British Virgin Islands*

_Holiness means to be completely dedicated to God for the sole purpose of letting Him work through you. When you are holy before God, everything about your existence—your actions, thoughts, and will—are in line with His principles and His will._

Matthew 10:42 says that even if you give a cup of cold water to the least of His followers, you will surely be rewarded. Such actions can conquer the heart and penetrate the soul of the receiver. The driving force behind such actions is godly love; and when you are holy, you will reflect such love in all that you do.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 indicates the sphere in which Christ is to make the believers blameless. He will so enable them to live holy lives that they will be able to stand without censure before the Judge of the universe. ‘Unblameable in holiness’ represents the highest possible ethical and spiritual standard. The apostle believes that such a standard can be reached by the grace that Christ supplies to those of His followers who increase in love. To believe less would be to deny the gospel.

Paul prayed a timeless and genuine prayer. He prayed that the hearts of the Thessalonian converts would be blameless and holy through godly love. Paul loved them and knew that the only way they could be saved was for them to have such love in their hearts. However, he also knew that the only way this would be possible would be through God's help. God needed to strengthen their hearts against the devil so that they could withstand his attacks and follow godly principles. The fact that this was a prayer and not just a command indicates that such could only be done with God's help.

**Is It Worth It? (Matt. 24:9-22)**

Some people will hate us because of our right standing before God. We will be persecuted because of this. In the last days, love will leave many people and hatred will take its place. Sin will be prevalent everywhere (Matt. 24:12). There may come a time when we will not be able stay in the comfort of our homes and we will have to flee, leaving our earthly possessions behind. It will be “a time of greater horror than anything the world has ever seen or will ever see again” (Matt. 24:21, NLT). Will being blameless and holy be worth it even then? Yes, because only those who remain blameless and holy will be saved.

Even when we have lost everything and have to flee, it will be worth it in the end. God loves us so immensely, and He wants us to be saved. He will strengthen our hearts if we are determined to be blameless and holy, and when He returns, we will live with Him for all eternity. Being holy according to His standard is possible only so far as the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, are the keys to being blameless and holy. If we pray and believe that God will make us strong enough to resist Satan's attacks, He will wash away our sins so that we can stand pure before Him when He returns.

**tuesday AUGUST 7**

**Testimony Choosing Friends**

**1 Thess. 2:13-3:13**

*Petal Sampson, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies*

As we read the verses listed above, we can see that, to Paul, the Thessalonians aren't just church members; they are his friends. There is a deep, emotional bond between Paul and these people, and he stresses that bond as he seeks to continue reinforcing in their minds the love that he has for them. Because of all the sin in the world, Paul knew how important it is to choose our friends wisely, friends who will love us and who will help us to remain in God. “Like Israel, Christians too often yield to the influence of the world and conform to its principles and customs, in order to secure the friendship of the ungodly; but in the end it will be found that these professed friends are the most dangerous of foes. The Bible plainly teaches that there can be no harmony between the people of God and the world.” (1 John 15:18, NASB). Satan works through the ungodly, under cover of a pretended friendship, to allure God's people into sin, that he may separate them from Him; and when their defense is removed, then he will lead his agents to turn against them and seek to accomplish their destruction.”

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1 See The SDA Bible Commentary, 2nd ed., vol. 7, p. 235.

2. What does Paul’s example of encouragement tell us?

1. Think of some tangible ways you can encourage someone you know who is going through a difficult time.

“Lead by example. Paul reminded the believers that he was a living sermon. Our example to others builds their faith because it proves that they are not the only ones struggling and that it is possible to gain the victory. This is exactly what Christ’s perfect example does for us. While we must all look to Him, we must walk worthy of the calling we have received by being an example to others. Remember, we may be the only “Christ” that some people will ever see. So we must be cognizant of the life we live as Christians.

Give commendations when they are due. Just as we love to receive uplifting words, sharing such words ourselves will go a long way toward helping fellow believers walk the Christian path. Paul freely lavished commendation when it was warranted, highlighting the positive aspects of one’s Christian experience so that the person would be encouraged to continue with it. We, too, should commend the progress of others because it reaffirms their faith and inspires further progress in their Christian experience.

Pray without ceasing. Paul took every opportunity to let the Thessalonian Christians know that he was praying for them. We also should take every opportunity to pray for each other. Remember, too, that Christ Himself prayed for His disciples. Prayer changes things. It can strengthen us to bear the burdens and challenges of life.

When we begin to serve as Christ would have us serve, we will see that through helping others along the “narrow way,” we are actually helping ourselves. Paul sent personal encouragement to the believers in Thessalonica when he himself was distressed. Simply knowing that they were holding to the faith gave him courage as well. So the principle is clear. When we help others, we help ourselves, and collectively such relationships help all of us as believers in Christ Jesus.

**REACT**

1. Think of some tangible ways you can encourage someone you know who is going through a difficult time.

**thursday AUGUST 9**

**Opinion Finding Faith, Courage, and Support**

1 Thess. 2:13-3:10

Ashley Woodruff, Nampa, Idaho, U.S.A.

Paul had been preaching in Thessalonica only a few weeks before he was forced to leave. Soon afterward, the Christians there faced persecution. By attacking so quickly, Satan hoped to destroy them before they could become secure in their relationship with Christ.

The Thessalonians aren’t the only ones to have experienced persecution immediately following their conversion. The book To Persia, With Love recounts the story of a Kurdish insurgent whose encounter with a Christian soldier led him to become a Christian. Seeking to be baptized, he went to a Presbyterian mission, but the pastor was suspicious of his motives and turned him away. Next, he went to a Catholic mission. There the priest prayed with him and baptized him. Weeks later, Muslim Kurdish fighters attacked the village where he was staying. Refusing to give up his new faith, he was publicly hanged as a warning to anyone else thinking of converting to Christianity.

Being a Christian isn’t just about attending church or having long philosophical discussions over Bible passages. It’s about placing a target on your back, telling the enemy to “fire at will,” and having faith that Jesus will be your shield. Being a Christian is also about holding each other up and praying for one another day and night, like Paul did for the Thessalonians. “Our prayer must not be self-centered. It must arise not only because we feel our own need as a burden we must lay upon God, but also because we are so bound up in love for our fellow men that we feel their need as acutely as our own. To make intercession for men is the most powerful and practical way in which we can express our love for them.”

From the Thessalonian church and the Christian Kurd we can see that others have suffered before us, but their faith did not fail. Like these Christians, may we be strong in our faith and hold each other up, so that we too can win the battle through Christ.

**REACT**

1. How are Christians having their faith tested now?

2. How have others held you up during difficult times? How have you supported others when they needed it?

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friday AUGUST 10

Exploration *Strengthening Our Hearts*  
1 Thess. 3:13

Alan Hecht, Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.

**CONCLUDE**

Many popular Christian preachers or teachers seem to convey the impression that life's problems will simply shrink or go away when one accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. What a shock it may be to discover that one is still subject to the difficulties common to all who live in this fallen world. Worse, as Christians, we may now have to face criticism, ridicule, or even persecution and discrimination from those who just don't get it! But the Bible assures us many times that we can expect to be misunderstood and persecuted, because it happened to some of the best people. In fact, it happened to the Best Person of all. We can respond the same way He did: strengthen our hearts, strive for His holiness, and focus on what is to come.

**CONSIDER**

- Drawing, painting, or otherwise depicting the second coming of Christ. Be sure to put yourself in the scene. How does making this a visual reality help to motivate you in the face of whatever trials you may be facing?
- Thinking about what draws your attention away from the things of God or about what entices you to settle for something less than what He has for you. Make a list as you observe your behavior and thoughts through the day. Devise a plan to minimize the distractions.
- Writing a paragraph or two about the promises God has made to us if we stand firm in His truth. What do these promises mean for you, and why are they worth facing the persecution and trials that the Bible tells us are intrinsic to being a follower of Christ?
- Finding at least one person in your church and regularly encouraging them in their ministry. Or at least verbally show appreciation for what they do.
- Planting a seed. It takes faith for us to plant a seed and expect something to come of it. The laws of nature that tell us that something will grow from a seed can even be wrong in individual instances. But if we have faith in the likelihood that a plant will grow from a seed, how much more faith should we have in the promises of the God who created nature?

**CONNECT**


lesson seven AUGUST 11-17

Living Holy Lives
"For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thess. 4:7, NIV).

sabbath AUGUST 11

Introduction Red Light District
Gen. 38:12-26; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 21:8

Daniel Saputra, Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia

Most cities have a “red light district.” This term is used to designate a part of town where sex-oriented businesses flourish. The term itself comes from the color of a light bulb in a window or on a porch that is used to signify what goes on inside. De Wallen, the red light district in Amsterdam, is so famous that it is a tourist attraction even if those visiting there do not want to pay for any of the services. The Netherlands government has regulated and legalized the activities that take place in De Wallen. Thailand has done the same for such businesses within its borders. By doing so, both countries hope to control and even prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Sexual promiscuity has been a problem as old as sin. Judah approached a harlot who turned out to be his daughter-in-law (Gen. 38:12-26). In the Gentile world, the priestess who stood alongside the male leader in performing spiritual rites also functioned as a prostitute. It was believed that in order for human beings to commune with the deity, men must have a sexual relationship with the priestess.

However, God does not approve of such activities. To Him, “marriage is to be honored by all, and husbands and wives must be faithful to each other. [He] will judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery” (Heb. 13:4, TEV). Those who are unfaithful in these matters and do not seek forgiveness will not be able to enter heaven (Rev. 21:8).

The situation in Thessalonica during Paul’s time was no different from the red light districts of today and current society’s general attitudes toward sexual activity. Paul, therefore, urged the newly converted Christians of Thessalonica to refrain from sexual impurity (1 Thess. 4:3) because God created such activities to occur only within a marriage relationship.

This week, we will study Paul’s words to the Thessalonians, and to us, regarding the necessity of living a sanctified life free of sexual immorality. Doing so is a part of God’s call to live a holy life.

sunday AUGUST 12

Logos The Lifestyle of the Remnant Church in Thessalonica
Gen. 39:9; Matt. 25:34-46; John 13:34, 35; 1 Thess. 4:1-12

Victor Joe Sinaga, Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, and was located about 99 miles southwest of Philippi. The church in Thessalonica was established by Paul on his second missionary journey. However, his ministry there was opposed by the Jews, so he left (Acts 17:1-10).

After Paul arrived in Corinth about a.d. 51, he received a letter from Timothy describing the condition of the church in Thessalonica. Paul then wrote to the church to express his joy for their strong faith amid the tribulation they were suffering. He also wanted to teach them further about living a holy life and explain to them the destiny of righteous people who die before Christ’s return. Following are some of the important lessons Paul wanted to convey to God’s people in the Thessalonian church. They are still relevant for us today.

The Holiness of Marriage (1 Thess. 4:1-8)

The world we live in provides many temptations, so Paul explicitly reminds us about the importance of living a holy life, of which maintaining the sacredness of marriage is a part. “Living a sacred life should be the ideal of every believer, and the church cannot have power without purity of life.” 2 Joseph’s example is a good one for us to follow when he responded to temptation by asking, “How . . . can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9).

Paul longed for every married couple to keep their union holy and not to be influenced by the improper practices of the people of Thessalonica. (See Ephesians 5:3 and Colossians 3:5.) God established the sacred marriage institution in Eden and determined that every man shall have his own wife, and every woman shall have her own husband (1 Cor. 7:2).

“Choose poverty, reproach, separation from friends, or any suffering rather than to defile the soul with sin. Death before dishonor or the transgression of God’s law should be the motto of every Christian.”3

Brotherly Love (1 Thess. 4:9, 10)
Paul reminded the church members in Thessalonica to love one another. Doing so would be a testimony to people outside of the church. It is all right for us to live among people who are wretched, poor, and not getting proper attention, for doing so gives us the opportunity to teach them about a loving God. Indeed, God calls us to be the first people who show real love to the poor. James wrote that loving others as ourselves is part of what keeping God’s law is all about (James 2:8).

Godly love, developed through the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit, motivates our service to other people while at the same time promotes and unites the church. “Knowledge, benevolence, eloquence, gratitude, and zeal are all aids in the good work; but without the love of Jesus in the heart, the work of the Christian minister is a failure.”

**Honest Work (1 Thess. 4:11, 12)**

It seems that many people today are lazy. They waste their time and do not give an honest day’s work in exchange for their paycheck. Christians, however, know that they are God’s stewards and therefore must work honestly.

Life can be divided into four basic parts, each part a gift from God. He gives us body, ability, time, and property. In addition, He asks us to take care of the world around us. That is why Paul urges the Christians in Thessalonica (and us today) to work hard. Doing so wins the respect of others and helps us to live independently. God calls us to live holy lives (1 Thess. 4:7). Refusing to do so is equal to refusing Him (1 Thess. 4:8). Earlier in his letter, Paul commends the Thessalonica church members for their faithfulness and diligence in living the Christian life. Next, he explains what God’s will is for them: sanctification, abstaining from sexual immorality by upholding faithful and honorable marriages (1 Thess. 4:3-5), treating others honestly (1 Thess. 4:8), loving one another (1 Thess. 4:9, 10), leading a quiet life, minding one’s own business, and working diligently so that others will see the Christian as honorable (1 Thess. 4:11, 12). He closes this section of his letter by reminding them to encourage one another with the promise of Christ’s second coming.

**REACT**

1. How do we establish a united church and keep a holy life? What should be the driving force of our efforts to do so?

2. What will help us to prepare for the soon coming of Jesus?

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3. Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 147.
4. The Desire of Ages, p. 815.

**monday AUGUST 13**

**Testimony “Holier, Holier Still”**

1 John 2:6

Roy Maju Hutaseoit, Bandung, Indonesia

“Let those who have become sleepy and indifferent awake. We are called to be holy, and we should carefully avoid giving the impression that it is of little consequence whether or not we retain the peculiar features of our faith. Upon us rests the solemn obligation of taking a more decided stand for truth and righteousness than we have taken in the past. The line of demarcation between those who keep the commandments of God and those who do not is to be revealed with unmistakable clearness. We are conscientiously to honor God, diligently using every means of keeping in covenant relation with Him, that we may receive His blessings—the blessings so essential for the people who are to be so severely tried. To give the impression that our faith, our religion, is not a dominating power in our lives is greatly to dishonor God. Thus we turn from His commandments, which are our life, denying that He is our God and that we are His people.”

“God has chosen men from eternity to be holy. This is the will of God, even your sanctification: ‘God's law tolerates no sin, but demands perfect obedience. The echo of God’s voice comes to us, ever saying. Holier, holier still. And ever our answer is to be, Yes, Lord, holier still. Holiness is within the reach of all who reach for it by faith, not because of their good works, but because of Christ’s merit. Divine power is provided for every soul struggling for the victory over sin and Satan. Justification means the saving of a soul from perdition, that he may obtain sanctification, and through sanctification, the life of heaven. Justification means that the conscience, purged from dead works, is placed where it can receive the blessings of sanctification.”

“The truth must sanctify the whole man—his mind, his thoughts, his heart, his strength. His vital powers will not be consumed upon his own lustful practices. These must be overcome, or they will overcome him.”

**REACT**

What is the difference between living holy lives and simply doing good works?

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3 Ibid., p. 909.

**tuesday AUGUST 14**

**Evidence The Call to Holiness**

1 Thess. 4:3-7

Mesnick M. W. Ataupah, Kupang, Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

“Thessalonica was an important city, and the capital of the second division of Macedonia. . . . The favorable location and excellent harbor of Thessalonica combined to make it of great commercial importance.” The population of Thessalonica was composed of Jews, Greeks (Acts 17:1, 4), and Romans. Paul went there on his second missionary journey.
The theme of Paul's two letters to the church in Thessalonica is "practical" godliness in view of Christ's return. The glorious advent of the Lord is the most prominent doctrine presented (chs. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23). Other doctrines mentioned are the death and resurrection of Christ (ch. 4:14), the resurrection of the righteous dead (vs. 13-16), future rewards and punishments (chs. 4:17; 5:3), the personal existence and active working of Satan (ch. 2:18), the doctrine of redemption, including election and sanctification (chs. 1:4; 4:3-7). All of us are unholy by nature. But by God's grace, by receiving Him into our hearts, we are made holy. We maintain this holiness by abiding in Him day and night. The Bible records some ideas on how this is to be done:

1. Control your own body (1 Thess. 4:4).
2. Eat healthful foods (Daniel 1:1-21).
3. Focus your mind and heart on good and holy things (Phil. 4:8).
4. Offer your body to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

As God sanctifies us, He gives us the strength to obey His commandments and to cooperate with Him in all aspects of daily life. Then we are bound to Him so that we may stand with Him in holy fellowship, both now and throughout eternity.

**REACT**

1. Think of three reasons why we are to receive God's holiness as our own holiness.
2. God will do His part in your life to be holy. What is your part in this process?
3. Is attending Sabbath School and church each Sabbath enough to make us holy? Explain your answer.

1 The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 223.
2 Ibid., p. 225.

**wednesday AUGUST 15**

*How-to Faith, Focus, Friends, Fun*

**Eccles. 11:9; Col. 3:2**

*Osvald O. Trarreh, Cibubur, West Java, Indonesia*

The world presents sexual temptations in a variety of ways. However, God has a variety of ways by which we can remain faithful to Him regarding these matters.

**Faith.** Research has shown that young people who internalize the beliefs of their religion, including those beliefs that relate to sexual purity, “are less likely to engage in risk behaviors even when circumstances motivate them to do so.” So put God first. Keep your faith in Him.

**Focus.** Always remember to focus on what God wants us to do and achieve. Paul reminds us to “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2, NKJV).

**Friends.** Sometimes we fall just because we choose the wrong friends. Read what James wrote about friendship in James 4:4, 5.

**Fun.** Lastly, enjoy your free time with pleasant activities suitable for Christians. Don't forget that mission trips and service projects in your own neighborhood and city can be great fun in addition to making life better for others.

**REACT**

1. Why is choosing good friends important in order to keep yourself from engaging in sexual promiscuity? If watching films at home is one of your hobbies, what will you do to prevent sexual misconduct?
2. The Bible vividly illustrates what happens when we decide to let Christ be Lord of every part of our lives. Read each set of texts that follows. Which set means the most to you, and why? Set One: Romans 6:1-13; Romans 7:4-6; 1 Peter 2:24. Set Two: Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:9, 10. Set Three: Romans 6:4, 11; Colossians 2:12, 13; Colossians 3:1, 3.
3. What other ways can you think of to remain faithful to Christ?


**thursday AUGUST 16**

*Opinion Procreation and Pleasure*

**1 Thess. 4:1-12**

*Fritz and Joice Manurung, Jakarta, Indonesia*

It appears from this week's lesson that one of the problems the newly formed church in Thessalonica had to deal with involved sexual immorality. Not much has changed, has it? Much of the world seems obsessed with sex. Most of today's popular television shows, films, and music glamorize it in promiscuous ways.

In fact, the temptation to engage in sexual intercourse outside of the marriage relationship has been powerful ever since sin entered the world. Giving in to that temptation can have disastrous results. Sexual sins hurt individuals, families, businesses, churches, and society in general. Besides the physical consequences, there are also spiritual consequences. God created sex for procreation and pleasure, and as an expression of love between a husband and wife. Sexual experience must be limited to the marriage relationship to avoid hurting ourselves, our relationship to God, and others. The Bible teaches us that love between a husband and wife “is an unconditional, affectionate, and intimate devotion to each other that encourages mutual growth in the image of God in all aspects of the person: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Different types of love operate in marriage: it has its romantic, passionate times; its comfortable times; its companionable and sense-of-belonging times. But it is the agape love
described in the New Testament—the selfless, all-for-other love—that comprises the foundation of true, lasting marital love.2

**REACT**

1. Why do sexual sins hurt not only one person but entire families, businesses, and churches?
2. How can we place our sexual desires and activities under Christ's control?
3. Compare/contrast your concept of love to Paul's definition in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. What specific behaviors would be eliminated if people asked God to help them develop this type of love?

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**friday AUGUST 17**

**Exploration Living to Please God**

**1 Thess. 4:1-12**

**Mary Beth Smythe, London, England**

**CONCLUDE**

Paul had instructed the Christians in Thessalonica to live in a way that would please God. This instruction is for us also. In fact, if we sincerely claim to be Christ's followers, we can live no other way. When we accept Christ's justification for us, we begin the process of living holy lives. This process is called sanctification and occurs through the influence of the Holy Spirit on our hearts and minds. This third member of the Godhead works in us to transform our old way of life so that we develop a character like that of our Savior. Thus Christianity does not involve so much a list of dos and don'ts as it does having a fulfilling relationship with Christ.

**CONSIDER**

- Writing in your journal your reaction to what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. Think about why you reacted the way you did and what your reaction says about how you feel and think about living to please God.
- Doing research on the Web site of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists® regarding any of the following topics relating to 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12: marriage, fornication, sanctification, holiness, Holy Spirit, brotherly love, purity.
- Drawing, painting, or sculpting what a particular aspect of a holy life might look like today.
- Role-playing with a group of friends or with your Sabbath School class various stories in the Bible that show us what Paul says about living a holy life.
- Forming a choral reading group to perform the following Scripture readings from The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal for either a Sabbath School program, a church service, or a visit to a nursing home: No. 787—"Christianity in Practice"; No. 789—"Growing in Christ"; No. 812—"Christian Relationships."

**CONNECT**

1 Corinthians 6:18-20; Galatians 5:13-26; Ephesians 4-6.

The Dead in Christ
"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" (1 Thess. 4:16).

Introduction A Reason to Smile
1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 1 Thess. 4:15, 16
Carl Henry, Biloxi, Mississippi, U.S.A.

In our home, death was discussed just as freely as you might discuss what you would have for dinner. Death was something that happened every day. You heard about it on the news or read about it in the newspapers, and my dad often conducted funerals. You knew you had to prepare for death. You knew you would die because it is a normal process in the life cycle. Our pets would die and we would cry, and we would wonder why they had to die. However, life and death take on a completely different perspective when a person you love dies.

The first time death really struck home for me was when my dad died. He, my brothers, and I had many fun times together. We went places as a family, and we did lots of “guy” things together. We fixed the tires on the car, pulled apart Mom's electrical appliances and got them working again, mowed and manicured the lawn, climbed trees, and learned a lot. Then suddenly, my dad became ill. The specialists performed many tests and concluded that he only had a short time left to live. My dad told us to be obedient children, and he would see us again when Jesus returned.

Somehow, the everyday talk about death and dying had not really sunk in. We were too young to understand. What we were constantly reminded of, however, was that Jesus was coming in the clouds to take us to heaven where we would live with Him forever! The Bible stories were graphically inscribed in our minds. Our worship songs such as “Lift Up the Trumpet” echoed our beliefs. And our dad had often preached about the certainty of Christ’s return (1 Thess. 4:15, 16). So we knew it was something that was going to happen and that we were all going to be a part of the grand reunion (1 Cor. 15:51, 52).

Yes, death makes us sad. However, the promise of Christ’s return, when He will wipe every tear from our eyes and put an end to death forever, makes us smile and gives us indescribable hope and joy (Rev. 21:4). It’s surely going to be a marvelous time of reunion when He comes again. We need to give everyone the message of the certainty of Christ’s return, and we need to be ready to live with Him forever.

Evidence Dry Your Tears
1 Thess. 4:13-18
O. Patricia Haakmat, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies

Thessalonica was an important city during Paul’s time. It was strategically located on a natural harbor and a well-developed highway called the Egnatian Way. This road connected Rome in the west to territories in the east and north. Its population was diverse, and because it was commercially vibrant, merchants from many countries came there to do business. It also had a large Jewish settlement as well as many travelers and tourists.

With such a mixed population came a variety of customs, philosophies, and religious beliefs. The church reflected this diversity in the composition of its believers. The “devout Greeks” (Acts 17:4) came from a polytheistic background and did not have a clear understanding of the Jewish religion. Though the Jews believed in one God, they did not all have the same set of beliefs. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (Matt. 22:23). This could have influenced new Gentile believers and could have accounted for the excessive grieving for loved ones who had died—a report brought to Paul’s attention.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, Paul encouraged the believers to live holier lives. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, however, he somewhat abruptly begins to discuss death and the resurrection. Here he tells his readers that they need not mourn the loss of loved ones as if they would not see them again; and he reminds them that because of Jesus’ resurrection, those who died in Him will also be resurrected. Then the resurrected ones, along with those who are still alive, will all be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air when He returns.

REACT

1. What misconceptions do you believe Paul was able to clarify in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18?
2. Given the importance of Thessalonica, how could Paul’s letter influence a larger community?

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monday AUGUST 20

Logos Resurrection Reality

John 5:28, 29; Acts 17:13; 1 Cor. 15:20-23, 51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:4-6

Jerome Wilson and Jermaine Burrawes, Sandy's, Bermuda, British Territory

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul writes to the Thessalonians about Christians who have died and what will happen to them. Perhaps Timothy, who had just returned from Thessalonica, shared with Paul that many church members there desired to know how these people would be able to share in the glory of Christ's kingdom when He returned.

The Genesis of Death (Gen. 2:17; 3:1-19; Rom. 6:23; Hebrews 11:1-40)

The Bible first mentions death in Genesis 2, where God instructed Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil—that if they did, they would die. This was a simple command, for God already had given them many other trees that were good for food. What happened to them after they ate from the wrong tree caused them to lose the gift of eternal life originally given them. First John 3:4 states that sin is the transgression of God's law. Paul says in Romans 6:23 that "the wages of sin is death" (NIV).

Today, even the most devout believers and the most ardent doubters must face the inevitable penalty of disobedience. However, all is not lost. God's great gift to us through His Son is eternal life (Rom. 6:23). Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab are all remembered in God's record of heroic faith (Hebrews 11:1-40). They all lived by faith until they died without having received what God had promised. However, because of their faith in the Redeemer, they will once again embrace life.

Hope for the Dead (Matt. 9:18, 23-25; 11:25, 26)

The reality of death is something we all struggle with. Every person knows that if this world lasts long enough they, too, will die. We know about death and we discuss the fragility of life, yet when faced with the realities of death, the feelings of loss and despair are difficult to overcome. Despite these emotions, Jesus reassuringly tells us the following about Himself: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26, NKJV).

Throughout the Bible we see that Jesus demonstrated His power over sin and death time and time again. In Mark 5 we read about how He raised Jairus's daughter from death. Then in John 11 we find Him bringing Lazarus back to life. Upon hearing of Lazarus's demise, He told the disciples that "our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up" (John 11:11, NKJV). Believers who die in Christ can find assurance in the promise of Jesus and in His power to revive them when He returns.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 20:18, 19)

Jesus' death was a severe blow to those who knew and loved Him. For almost three years the disciples had eaten, traveled, and communed with Him daily. He had healed the sick, turned water into wine, and raised the dead. Then He was gone. How could this be? In preparing His disciples for the eventuality of His death, Jesus told them that "the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests . . . and they shall condemn him to death . . . and the third day he shall rise again" (Matt. 20:18, 19; italics supplied).

The disciples were forewarned. They had witnessed Lazarus being raised from the dead, but they did not believe that the Man to whom they were so devoted would die. The hours following His death were very dark indeed. However, Jesus did not stay in the grave. He rose again and charged them to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15, 16, NKJV). If we believe these words and order our lives accordingly, then if we should die before Christ returns, we will arise to be with Him forever.

The Believers' Resurrection (Luke 24:5, 6; John 11:25, 26; 1 Cor. 15:55-57)

What happens when someone dies? This question has been asked for centuries by philosophers, scientists, and religious observers alike. The answer, however, is clearly given in Scripture. John 11:25, 26 say that those who die in Jesus will live again because Jesus overcame death through His resurrection. Today we can say along with Paul, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin. . . . But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

Yes, the resurrection is a reality. Death is not the end. The resurrection of believers turns sorrow into joy and fear into hope (Rev. 20:4-6). But the resurrection of the unrepentant is a resurrection to their final end (Rev. 20:13-15). God does not want anyone to face this second resurrection (1 Tim. 2:3, 4). He has provided a way for all people to accept His saving grace and His offer of eternal life. That way is Jesus Christ.

tuesday AUGUST 21

Testimony I Found a New Life

1 Cor. 15:51-55; 1 Thess. 4:13-18

Mark Henry, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, U.S.A.

Paul wrote to the converts in Thessalonica to direct them to the truths concerning their loved ones whom they thought they would never see again once they had laid them to rest. They "had hoped that all would witness the second coming of Christ; but they were in great sorrow as one after another of the believers fell under the power of death, making it impossible for them to behold that desirable event—the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven.

"Paul then endeavored to inform his Thessalonian brethren concerning the true state of the dead. He speaks of them as asleep—in a state of unconsciousness. . . .

"The hope and joy which this assurance gave to the young church at Thessalonica can scarcely be understood by us. . . .

"The darkness that had enshrouded the sepulcher of the dead was dispelled; for they now knew that their believing friends would be resurrected from the grave, and enjoy immortal life in the kingdom of God.1

"Is there any reason why this lively hope should not give us as much confidence and joy at this time as it gave the disciples in the early church? Christ . . . is risen and has ascended up on high, and we are to act out our faith, that the world may see we have a lively hope.2

When the Son of man comes, the dead are raised incorruptible and the living are changed. Christ confers immortality upon His people. Then He calls

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Rev. 20:4-6

1 Cor. 15:55-57

2 Tim. 2:3, 4

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
them to inherit the kingdom of God to which, until then, they have only been heirs.

“The teachings of the apostle upon this point are especially important to the church in our time.” “The friends of the righteous dead should not sorrow as those who lose their loved ones and have no hope in Jesus Christ, and who are not cheered by the immortal future beyond the resurrection of the just.”

1 Sketches From the Life of Paul, pp. 111, 113.
2 In Heavenly Places, p. 45.
3 Sketches From the Life of Paul, pp. 111, 115.

**How-to Ready, Dead or Alive**

**1 Cor. 15:20; 1 Thess. 4:16-18**

Lilith R. Scarlett, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies

Although the Christian’s foundation is anchored in the sure Word of God, some truths are difficult to comprehend. The Christians in Thessalonica were not clear regarding the fate of those who died before the return of Jesus. The Word of God instructs us not to be concerned about those who have died in Jesus. There was no need to worry then, and there is no need to worry now. What is important is that we must prepare by doing the following:

Carefully study God’s Word. To comprehend the resurrection, learn what you can about the mystery of death. Christ became the “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20, NKJV). Resurrection power resides only in God’s hands and is the power that will call to consciousness those who die in the Lord. This gives us confidence that we and our faithful loved ones will arise at the Second Coming.

Point others to the truth of God’s Word. Christ's transforming power changes a believing person from the state of being dead in sins to a state of being alive in Christ. When we become alive in Him, we begin to feel a sense of eagerness, a rush of energy, to share His promises with others.

Ensure that we remain in a state of readiness. Because “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4), we should when necessary confess our sins and reconcile with God.

Jesus’ promise to return (Acts 1:9-11) will be fulfilled. The same Jesus whom the disciples saw ascending into heaven will descend at the Second Coming. Jesus will not send a deputy to do the job for Him. He Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, and all who died in Christ shall rise first (1 Thess. 4:16). He comes as “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15) for those who love him. As we await the Second Advent, let us live for Christ so we can live with Him in the new earth.

**REACT**

1. Are we doing enough to help others to be ready?
2. Why might we be reluctant to witness? What can we do if we are reluctant?
3. Do we have to understand all truth in order to be saved? Explain your answer.

**Opinion Thank God for the Resurrection**

Beverly I. Henry, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies

The newscast showed clouds of dust and smoke rising. People were running as though in a daze, their body language saying, “What’s happening? This can’t be happening!” Aftershocks followed the 6.3 magnitude earthquake at 12:51 p.m. on February 22, 2011, in Christchurch, New Zealand, barely six months after the 7.0 quake which rattled that country in September of 2010. Before the world could reconcile that disaster, two other tragedies struck on March 11—the 9.0 earthquake in Sendai, Japan, and the resulting tsunami. I gasped as I watched the wall of water devour everything and everyone in its path. Could it be that these were all a fulfillment of prophecy that the Bible points to just before Christ’s second coming (Luke 21:11)? How many people died? Did they have hope in the resurrection?

Eyewitness descriptions and video clips recounted the terror etched on people’s faces as they streamed out of heaving buildings. Water mains busted, roads crumbled, and fires flared. Terror filled the population. Is this a reflection of the terror that will be seen on people’s faces when they ask for the rocks and mountains to fall on them (Rev. 6:15-17)?

As people clung to floating rooftops, did they wonder if there was any hope of being saved? Did any of them consider what would happen to them in the resurrection? Did they even believe in the resurrection?

I prayed that the rescuers would find those who were still alive. What about your loved ones and their decision for eternity? Should we be frantically getting in touch with our family and friends to check on their assurance of salvation? The church must be vigilant in warning the lost. Thank God, if we are faithful, whether we die before the Lord comes or are alive at the Second Coming, we shall be saved (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

**REACT**

1. Will God really not allow some people into heaven, or is that only to frighten us into obedience? Isn't hell for Satan and his angels?
2. Because God will save us when we repent, why can't we wait until we've had all the experiences and fun we need before making that decision?
3. Does what you believe about death, heaven, and hell make a difference? Explain your answer.
The Thessalonians, like other early Christian church members, fully expected Christ's soon return. But as time passed and believers fell asleep in death, Paul wanted to reassure their loved ones that they didn't need to grieve like those without hope. Jesus already had victory over the grave and over all sorrow caused by sin. Those who died trusting in what He had done for them would sleep until He called them to awaken in the resurrection and rise to meet Him in the air along with those still alive at His return. Those who had died wouldn't miss any of the excitement of Christ's return, and those who lived could comfort and encourage each other with this hope.

Memorizing the hymn "Gleams of the Golden Morning" (no. 205 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal; online at http://www.hymn.time.com/tch.htm?g/l/e/gleamsgm.htm), or writing your own poem or song about Christ's victory over death.

Designing a card, painting, or other piece of art that illustrates the hope of sleeping and waking in Jesus and then giving it to a friend who has lost a loved one or who is facing death.

Interviewing several mentors whose relationship with Christ has been a blessing to you. Ask them what it means to them to fall asleep in Christ.

Creating a scrapbook of highlights in your walk with Christ. Ponder Paul's comment that "whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:10, NIV).

Thinking about how nature can be a metaphor for the experience of being born in Christ, living in Him, dying in Him, and being raised in the first resurrection.

lesson nine AUGUST 25-31

Final Events

“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 Thess. 5:8, ESV).

sabbath AUGUST 25

Introduction Watching for the Morning

Matt. 5:14-16; 1 Thess. 5:1-11

Rachelle Nelson, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.

At 6:30 your alarm rings. You know you should get up, but you're unable to muster the energy. Finally, there comes a point when you can no longer hit the snooze button—class is in ten minutes. So you leap out of bed, jam yourself into clothes, sweep papers and books into your bag, and rush off. After a full day of classes, errands, homework, and earning money, you return to your dwelling, exhausted. So you play some music, read a book, surf the Web. Then your eyes begin to droop. You fall asleep, just to repeat the cycle tomorrow.

In the busyness of life, it's easy to neglect personal time with God. This week's lesson focuses on being ready for Christ's return. Paul contrasts two classes of people: those who will be ready and those who will not. It's easy to not be ready. Such people are described as children of the night, being drunk and asleep. Their senses dulled, they will not discern when the time is at hand. To them it will be like a thief striking their home at night—impossible to predict and leaving devastating results.

The other class of people are children of the day. Like a pregnant woman, they are aware that the time is near. When the labor pains start, they are ready for the joyous result. They are awake, sober, and watching. As the Pathfinder law declares, they have kept "the morning watch." The morning watch in the ancient world lasted from about three to six a.m. It is a tranquil time when many people are still asleep. In the spiritual darkness of our world, it is imperative that we stay in the light of God's Word. We must commit to scheduling time with God, or else we will crowd Him out of our busy lives.

Additionally, we are "the light of the world." We are to share that light with those with whom we come into contact (Matt. 5:14-16). We are not the light from the world, but from God to the world. The moon is a classic example. Most people are aware that it reflects the sun's light during the night, making our nights a little brighter. God is the supreme Light, and we reflect that light to the dark world until dawn (His second coming) breaks.

As you study this week, pay attention to how you can be ready for Christ's second coming. Also, be the light God calls you to be to those around you.

sunday AUGUST 26

Logos Preparing for the Thief

1 Thess. 5:1-11

Rich Carlson, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.

How often I have read of thieves breaking into homes and stealing personal property. How often my initial reaction was critical—the homeowners should have been more careful; they should've locked their doors. I knew it would never happen to me—until it did! Only one garage door had been left open; afterward the only thing left to do was clean up the garage, take inventory of my losses, and deal with the feeling of being personally violated by someone who now had what belonged to me. Complacency cost me dearly.

How often I have read in the Bible about the devil—a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour, about young women who were not ready for the wedding and were dismissed from that for which they were longing. How often my initial reaction was critical of those "Laodicean" people who are being lulled to sleep by Jesus' apparent delay. I knew it would never happen to me—until it did! I have not yet been devoured or dismissed from the banquet, but I have had my moments when I wondered if passion for the Lord's return might be a bit overemphasized.

That appears to be where the Thessalonians were. In his first letter to them, Paul clarified details of that great day of the Lord and gave them a warning of the danger of a "peace and security" theology that could lull them right out of God's kingdom. That is our lesson this week.

The Problem (1 Thess. 5:2)

The thief is coming! In fact, he's already here, devouring, destroying, deceiving, and deflecting attention away from God and toward the cares of this world. When I forget this, I'm in danger of missing the party. I don't know too many Christians who don't want the Lord to come. I know quite a few who have been distracted to wondering when, or even if, He'll ever make it. Retaining hope is hard over time.

The Promise (1 Thess. 5:5)

You are not in darkness. God has provided everything necessary for salvation and for understanding the reality of His coming. The fact of His first
coming and ascension linked directly with the statement of assurance in His second coming confirms the promise for me (Acts 1:7-11). God's promises, imbedded in His word and surrounded by facts, can help me be attentive to their fulfillment.

**The Protection (1 Thess. 5:8)**

First Thessalonians 5:8 is a reminder that protection from Second Coming complacency starts with self-control—doing or thinking what is right no matter what happens. I cover my heart with faith and love. I cover my head with hope. Using the analogy of a warrior protecting his most vital organs, Paul describes the successful Christian as the one who covers the areas most susceptible to spiritual attack. My emotional focus is on God's goodness and love in which I retain faith. My rational focus centers on the hope that I have in His soon coming. No matter what, it's a better deal to believe in Jesus, even if He's not true, than not to believe in Him and find out too late that He is true.

**The Proposal (1 Thess. 5:9)**

There is a lot I don't understand about God's will, but there is one thing about His will that is very clear—I am saved by Jesus and nothing else. If we believe in Him, we will be saved. Repentance and forgiveness, both criteria for eternal life, are gifts from the Savior. It's easy to get distracted from these provisions, and it usually results in some type of self-centered salvation that I work out with little assurance. No wonder I don't retain a passion for Jesus' coming. If I think it's about me, I'm not sure I'm ready!

**The Process (1 Thess. 5:11)**

Comfort and teach. This is the means of retaining a high level of expectancy regarding Jesus' return. The concept of eternal life from Jesus alone should bring comfort; and that emotional state of eternal life can become the message I teach to others. Gaining confidence and assurance for myself and then giving that assurance to others is how I retain a passion for the promised return. It's about giving rather than just receiving. If I receive this assurance from God and do nothing with it, I stagnate like a lake with no outlet. However, if I give to others what I receive for myself, I retain a vibrancy of life and a renewed expectancy for Jesus' return.

**REACT**

2. What is the worst thing that could happen if you became too excited about Jesus' return?
3. What do you see in your attitude that needs to change in order to find the balance between fanaticism and complacency?

**monday AUGUST 27**

**Testimony Are you ready? I am . . . I think?**

**Luke 12:16-21**

**Russ Huggins, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.**

The Laodiceans thought they had it all (Rev. 3:17). They represent many who think they have time to get ready, so they wait for a "Sunday law" or a "computer chip" to do so (Luke 12:16-21). But complacency and self-sufficiency are deadly. The Pharisees and Sadducees thought they knew it all, but they could not take part in the kingdom of God because of their pride and self-sufficiency. They rejected the Savior just like we do if we focus on the work and not on the gift that is Jesus.

Like the rich man in Luke, any of us can have our lives required of us now. Yet the Lord is . . . longsuffering and "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV). However, this is no excuse for complacency. We must repent of our sins (Acts 17:30) and work with the Lord in choosing to serve Him (Phil. 2:12, 13; Josh. 24:15). "The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. . . . Jesus does not change the character at His coming. The work of transformation must be done now. Our daily lives are determining our destiny. Defects of character must be repented of and overcome through the grace of Christ, and a symmetrical character must be formed while in this probationary state, that we may be fitted for the mansions above."1

Make your stand now for God and trust in His divine power. Only He can change you from glory to glory. "It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example."2 This is what it means to be ready spiritually. The remnant has a special calling. Will you heed this calling? Prepare now, for "the time is near" (Rev. 1:3, NKJV). "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev. 16:15).

**REACT**

1. How did Jesus prepare Himself spiritually for His ministry on earth?
2. How can we have assurance that we will be saved?

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1 Manuscript Releases, vol. 13, p. 82.
2 The Great Controversy, p. 598.
1. Compare and contrast 1 Thessalonians 5:1-28 to Ephesians 6:10-18 and 2 Peter 3:8. What are some of the recurrent themes?

2. There are many ways in which we are “asleep.” What steps can we take to awaken ourselves?

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**wednesday AUGUST 29**

**How to State of Readiness**


_Shy Conopio, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A._

“God is coming soon!” How many times have we heard that? In Matthew 24, Jesus talks about the signs of the end times. But haven’t these signs been occurring since sin entered the world? I know of people who were so sure Jesus would come during their lifetime because of all the events happening, but sadly they’re gone now—and still He hasn’t come. I was told in the year 2000 that the Sunday law was going to be implemented, and that surely God would really be coming soon. Twelve years later, I’m still on earth. I’m sure we can all relate to this. Nevertheless, we do need to be ready for Jesus’ return, because it’s easy to relax and lose that sense of urgency regarding the Second Coming. So how can we avoid losing that sense of urgency to be ready for Christ’s return? Following are some ideas.

**Realize that we may die before the end comes.** It would be great to see the Second Coming. But not everyone will. The question is, will we be ready if our life is taken before then? Accidents, natural disasters, new diseases, murders, and wars cover all parts of the earth. Even mosquitoes carry malaria and the West Nile virus. More than anything, Satan wants to prevent us from having eternal life. It’s scary, but it’s true. In a sense, we do not hold our life in our hands.

**Remember that we cannot prepare instantly.** You do not wait until the month or the day before your graduation or wedding to start preparing for these events. We know that preparing for a concert or a show requires many days and hours of practicing, vocalizing, memorizing, and rehearsing. To prepare our hearts for Jesus’ coming, we need to start submitting to Him now. We need to abide with Jesus every day. He is the one to prepare our hearts.

**REACT**

1. “Live as though today is your last” is a common saying. How can we apply that idea to our spiritual life to avoid being complacent?

2. If you knew that you had only one more year to live, what would you change about your life? What is stopping you from making that change?

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**thursday AUGUST 30**

**Opinion Being Ready**

Luke 21:34; Eph. 2:8, 9; 1 Thess. 5:8, 9, 11

_Serena Stevens, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A._

I have always loved the radio show “Adventures in Odyssey.” I listened to it every weeknight when I was younger. One episode told the story of Simon and Sunny. Sunny was bad. He cheated people, stole cars, and became a mob boss. Simon was good. He held charity dinners, prayed eloquently, and ran for president. It seemed clear where each was headed. However, both Sunny and Simon ended up in hell.

Sketchy theology aside, the episode made a valid point: being good and doing all the right things will not get us into heaven. Thankfully, our salvation is not contingent on anything we have to do, but rather on what God did for us on the cross. “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9, NIV). Because we cannot do anything on our own to be ready for Christ’s return, we have to hold tightly to God and trust that He will carry us through.

Although most Christians understand this, the concept seems to slip our minds when it comes to Christ’s return. Instead of waiting eagerly for our best Friend to come, we cower in fear. We try desperately to find out what “being ready” means and just how good we have to be to.

The way to be ready for Christ’s return is by continually building a relationship with Him. Abandoning such a relationship for our own desires will keep us from heaven. We cannot spend eternity with Him if we do not know Him.

Another part of being ready is building up other believers. Because “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation” (1 Thess. 5:9, NIV), we are told to put on a breastplate of faith—our relationship with God—and love—our relationship with others. 1 Thess. 5:11 says to “encourage one another and build each other up.” Luke 21:34 describes some distractions that can pop up: “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly” (NKJV). We will be ready for Christ’s return if we focus on growing with Him and learning from each other.

**REACT**

1. What is distracting you from being ready for Christ’s return?

2. How can you live out the directive to love and encourage others?

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Exploration *Watch and Be Ready*

**Mark 13:32, 33, 35-37**

**Allison Sauceda, Centerville, Ohio, U.S.A.**

**CONCLUDE**

As Jesus’ return approaches, there needs to be a sense of urgency within our hearts—the desire to prepare ourselves and to help others prepare so that when He comes, we are not caught unaware. This does not mean that we are merely doing all of the “right things.” We must also be in constant communication with God, building our relationship with Him, so that we may go home to heaven. We cannot wait until the last minute to prepare. We must intentionally be shaping our lives and our hearts to reflect His glory. In this way, we will be prepared for His return.

**CONSIDER**

- Brainstorming ways in which your Sabbath School class members can individually prepare for the Second Coming and ways in which you can help others in your community also feel the urgency. (This could lead to great opportunities for community outreach!)
- Memorizing scripture that deals with being ready for Jesus’ return. Whenever you feel as though you are becoming complacent, you can review these texts.
- Meditating on ways the Lord wants you to prepare for His return.
- Drawing or painting a picture of what you think the Second Coming will be like. (Isn’t it fantastic that it will exceed even our wildest imaginings?)
- Making a list of ways you personally can prepare for Christ’s return. Don’t be afraid to be brutally honest, as you are the only person who needs to see this list.
- Asking friends and family whether they are ready for the Second Coming. This may feel awkward or out of our comfort zone, but Christ has not asked us to take the easy road!
- Thinking about the sounds you will hear at the Second Coming. What music will there be? What will people be saying, and so on?
- Praying for the Lord to impress upon you how you can stay ready for His return, as well as people you may need to minister to in order that they may be ready.

**CONNECT**


*Maranatha, pp. 12, 15; The Great Controversy, pp. 677, 678.*

lesson ten SEPTEMBER 1-7

Church Life

"Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:20, 21, ESV)

sabbath SEPTEMBER 1

Introduction Church Life Revisited

Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:4

Norma Sahlin, Springboro, Ohio, U.S.A.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28, read Paul's final instructions to the Thessalonian Christians. Then read the following scenarios based on actual experiences and think of an appropriate response based on those instructions.

1. You are driving in the business district when you notice the pastor walking along. A paper bag with the name of a local liquor store is tucked under his arm.

2. The church is holding a talent show. During auditions, a lady shows up in a folk costume. She says she will be performing a folk dance from her heritage. The chair of the screening panel states emphatically that no dancing is allowed. The widow explains that this is part of her heritage and if her heritage is not acceptable then she knows she is not accepted. She leaves abruptly. Ten months pass, and she has not been back to church.

3. The nominating committee is meeting. As reports of contacts are given, someone mentions a name and says that that person turned down the committee's assigned role because he will serve only on a committee that has financial oversight.

4. The Sabbath School superintendent is a force to be reckoned with. She is never short of words and once shut down a long-winded speaker by saying, "Dear, your tongue is tied in the middle and flaps at both ends!" Another family was startled to learn that she had decided to hold a Sabbath School social in their home. She kindly informed them that since they were good cooks she would allow them to supply all the food.

5. The evangelistically oriented local church leaders were confident they could handle Sabbath services and potluck dinner while the pastor was gone. The sermon included a series of proof texts with a brief digression devoted to a rant about policies voted by the church hierarchy. After worship, people made their way to the potluck. Sitting at the last table was a young man reading the Bible. When another man asked if he could join him, the young man issued a welcome and they engaged in conversation. The young man was visiting. He had come to see what the "Sabbathkeepers were all about." The other man also was a visitor who lived a thousand miles away.

sunday SEPTEMBER 2

Evidence What Would Jesus Want?

1 Thess. 5:12-28

Melissa Sahlin, Mason, Ohio, U.S.A.

“To be able to give thanks in all circumstances presupposes a recognition of God's sovereignty, that in all these circumstances (whatever the appearance might be) he is working 'for the good of those who love him, who have been called to his purpose' (Romans 8:28). Finally, we note that God's will is said to be in Christ Jesus. In these matters, as in all others . . . his will is made known to us in Christ, whether in his practice or in his precepts, whether in the days of his flesh or through his Spirit. Moreover, only as we are 'in Christ' are we empowered through that same Spirit to do what God's will demands."

These comments on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 contain the key to understanding church life. It is not "our" church. It is not "my" church—no matter how much time or money I have invested in it. It is God's church, and He has revealed His will through Christ Jesus.

The whole purpose for coming together as a Christian community is to do what Jesus wants. Paul's "final instructions" in 1 Thess. 5:12-28 are more than a checklist of behaviors. He is telling us that we must never forget why church exists. Believers come together because Christ's sacrifice saves us from our sins and transforms us.

Therefore, Paul goes a step further, instructing us in 1 Thess. 5:19 not to put out the Spirit's fire. While advocating that prophecies be treated with respect, he also wanted the Thessalonians, and subsequent generations of believers, to strive for a balanced view. He counsels in 1 Thess. 5:21 to test everything—not to rush to reject or embrace, and, above all, to hold on to the good. Prophecies should reveal God's will through Christ, not supersede it.

1 Thess. 5:22 expands the focus of Paul's message: avoid every kind of evil. This being a sinful world, we cannot escape evil even if we were to move to an isolated compound. Stay connected to Jesus through prayer and Bible study. By embracing the simple question "What would Jesus want?" we can share our faith more effectively through our actions.
REACT

1. If your Christianity were called into question, what evidence could be given to support your stand?
2. Why is church life so often tangled up in personal issues and conflicts?

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1 David J. Williams, New International Biblical Commentary—1 and 2 Thessalonians, p. 100.

monday SEPTEMBER 3

Logos How to Live Together in the Church

Matt. 5:43-48; Mark 9:50; John 15:4-6; Rom. 12:17-20; Gal. 5:22-24; Phil. 4:4, 5; 1 Thess. 5:12-28

Monte Sahlin, Springboro, Ohio, U.S.A.

Paul had planted a small house church in Thessalonica a few years earlier, and Timothy had recently come to Paul with a report on its growth and problems. Paul's correspondence with this thriving church plant gives us insight into normal congregational life in the first century. In many ways it sounds like the way local churches often behave today.

Respect for Leadership (1 Thess. 5:12, 13)

Paul's practice was to appoint elders in each congregation before he moved on. The word for this leadership role is Presbyter, and it is translated as "bishop." These were the pastors of the first Christian churches. Then, as today, leadership cannot function unless it is respected by the group. The Thessalonian church had some difficulty on this point, as some churches do today. "Respect those . . . who are over you in the Lord," Paul writes (1 Thess. 5:12, NIV). Even though part of their job is to "admonish" church members, he instructs that we are to "hold them in the highest regard" (1 Thess. 5:13, NIV). Paul asks that respect for church leaders be extended "in love." Different opinions about how things are to be done or how Scripture is to be interpreted do not take away the basic requirement that Jesus' followers are to treat others kindly.

Dealing With Conflict (Mark 9:50; Rom. 12:17-20)

"Live in peace with each other" is a restatement of a basic command from Christ Himself (Mark 9:50). In Romans 12:18, Paul extends this command to include "all humanity." It is Christ's expectation that church members will "be at peace" with one another. It is foundational to their witness and worship. It is not necessary to agree with one another on all points or to have similar personalities and approaches to life. The point of this teaching is to demonstrate that in Christ people can live together in peace despite their differences of opinion, education, culture, and lifestyle.

If we are committed to living in peace with fellow church members, then we can have profitable discussions of our different views. We can listen to the people we disagree with and learn from them about their interpretations of Scripture. It does not mean we agree with them and give up our own ideas, but it does mean that we see different perspectives and begin to understand why others may see things differently from the way we do. Otherwise, we are always seeking to assert our views over those of others. This is not a Christlike way to live.

Helping Christians to Love One Another (Matt. 5:43-48; 1 Thess. 5:14)

In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul instructs us to admonish the "unruly" (KJV), "idle" (NIV), or "idlers" (RSV) in the congregation. This word literally refers to soldiers who are out of line as they march, perhaps taking an unauthorized break on the roadside. It is Christ's intention that "each" (1 Thess. 5:12, NIV) believer be active in some kind of service. When church members are not involved in community service, evangelism, or caring for others, they are more likely to be caught up in conflict, disagreements, and criticism.

"Encourage the timid." The word timid means "having a small heart." Some church members easily become discouraged. They need our care and support. We might think of these as the walking wounded.

"Help the weak." In other New Testament passages Paul uses the same word referring to those who are weak in financial resources (Acts 20:35), in physical health (1 Cor. 11:30), and in faith (Rom. 14:1). These are the poor and the sick as well as those who lack faith. In Christ, we all have an obligation to these people.

"Be patient [long suffering] with everyone." An Adventist local church should be a place of acceptance and peace where all participants can find "space" to grow spiritually, ask questions, think things through, and resolve doubts. This is particularly true because of the Sabbath, a weekly twenty fourhour spiritual retreat.

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong" (1 Thess. 5:15, NIV). Revenge is a common urge, but it is sinful. No matter how badly others treat us, we are to turn the other cheek and pray for our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

The Spiritual Foundation of Church Life (1 Thess. 5:12-28)

In researching church growth, I have discovered that one of the strongest correlations is that growing Adventist congregations have a strong sense that people who attend feel closer to God. This spiritual dimension is key to effective outreach and discipleship. It has a greater statistical correlation than evangelistic programs. We should not be surprised! Paul, the experienced and practical church planter, ends this letter to the Thessalonians with instruction about a strong spiritual life. Joy . . . continual prayer . . . God's purpose . . . the Spirit's fire . . . an openness to prophetic counsel (1 Thess. 5:16-20). All of these are essential to the life of any church.

REACT

1. Are you kind to those you disagree with in your local church?
2. What do the people in the neighborhood around your church see? Are you a visibly Christlike group? Do you extend visible respect and care to all people?

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1 Interpreter's Bible Commentary (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1999), p. 312.
Santhosh Jackson, Laurel, Maryland, U.S.A.

“Every individual among you must before God do a work for these last days that is great and sacred and grand. Every one must bear his weight of responsibility. The Lord is preparing each one to do his appointed work, and each one is to be respected and honored as a brother chosen of God, and precious in His sight. One man is not to be selected to whom all plans and methods shall be confidential, while the others are left out. If this is done, errors will be made; wrong moves will be taken. Harm, rather than good will be done. No one of you needs to be afraid of the other, lest the other shall have the highest place. Without partiality and without hypocrisy each is to be treated.

“The same line of work is not to be given to each worker; and for this reason you need to counsel together in that freedom and confidence that should exist among the Lord's workmen. All need to have less confidence in self, and far greater confidence in the One who is mighty in counsel who knoweth the end from the beginning.”

“God has invested His church with special authority and power, which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising; for he who does this despises the voice of God.

“Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme, are in grave peril. It is Satan's studied effort to separate such ones from those who are channels of light, through whom God has wrought to build up and extend His work in the earth. To neglect or despise those whom God has appointed to bear the responsibilities of leadership in connection with the advancement of the truth, is to reject the means that He has ordained for the help, encouragement, and strength of His people. For any worker in the Lord's cause to pass these by, and to think that his light must come through no other channel than directly from God, is to place himself in a position where he is liable to be deceived by the enemy, and overthrown.”

REACT

1. What are we telling the community about our faith when we are critical of our leaders and pastors?

1 Christian Leadership, p. 39.
2 Gospel Workers, p. 444.

wednesday SEPTEMBER 5

How-to Watching and Waiting for the Lord

1 Thess. 5:12-16

Gianluca Bruno, Mason, Ohio, U.S.A.

Paul closes his first letter of encouragement to the church in Thessalonica with final instructions on relationships between leaders and members. Action phrases predominate: Respect those who work hard and hold them in the highest regard. Live in peace. Warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Do not retaliate. Be kind. Always be joyful. Pray continually and give thanks in all things. Don't put out the Spirit's fire. Don't treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything and hold on to what is good. Avoid evil.

Christians should memorize this list and regularly review it. Following these commands will strengthen our faith and provide a positive witness to those around us. However, when these commands are not followed, there can be negative consequences. We all know someone who did not have a positive experience. Interviews with inactive church members tell us that many are not attending church because of broken relationships resulting from hurtful statements about such things as dress or church remodeling projects.

How we wait for the Lord's soon return testifies about our faith. Some ideas for achieving better relationships are:

Pray for your church leaders by name and in detail. Investing time with the Lord on behalf of specific people helps change your perception of them.

Adjust your attitude toward the church. Remember that it is God's church, not yours. You are a branch, Jesus is the vine.

Spend more time interacting with and listening to fellow members. Try to understand their perceptions. Find out their spiritual stories.

Remember that you may understand a situation differently than others. Embrace the diverse viewpoints that each member brings to the table. It will enlarge your vision of the church.

Perform as many unexpected acts of kindness as possible. This is a good way to encourage fellow members. Actions speak louder than words.

Remember that we are pilgrims, not settlers. This world is not our home.

REACT

1. What is the difference between being invested in the community of members and having a sense of ownership? Which attitude crosses the line from investment to proprietorship and thus usurps Jesus' role?

2. What specific actions can you take to deepen your sense of belonging?

thursday SEPTEMBER 6

Opinion A New Perspective on Thankfulness

1 Thess. 5:12-28

Stephanie Sahlin Jackson, Laurel, Maryland, U.S.A.

At first, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 seems like a list of dos and don'ts for a new church a long time ago in a situation so different from anything I could relate to. Then thanks to a Life Application Bible, I was able to hear something more personal in these verses: how to appreciate a pastor (I've got two in the family); how to maintain a prayerful attitude; and how to remember when evil strikes that God is still present. However, the items that really left a lasting impression on me are the following: be joyful, pray continually, and give thanks. Personally, I find that it is much easier to be critical than joyful, to jump into a meal without praying first, or to pray for God's help, but then forget to thank Him for it when it comes. So reading these verses creates a certain level of discomfort for me.

Life is so demanding that it's easy to become negative. After a long day at work, I often find myself thinking about all the things that annoyed me that day. However, after reading these verses, I am now challenging myself that whenever I think of an annoyance, I must instead think of something positive.
Being in a state of continuous prayer is something I've always wanted to think of myself as doing. Yet when I reflected on these verses and the level of discomfort that they produced in me, I have to be honest with myself. It's easy to remember God when I'm asking for the traffic to be light so I can make my early morning meeting. However, to meaningfully incorporate God into my streaming conscious seemed so daunting.

Then the Life Application Bible broke it down for me. Continuous prayer is being mindful of and acknowledging my dependence on God. It's as simple as the basics we were taught growing up—pray before each meal; start and end each day with prayer. Then in between, as I approach a challenging situation, pause to acknowledge that God is there with me and that I want to depend on Him through it all.

It's amazing how easy it is to be thankful when I am looking for the positive. It is these moments of thankfulness that I'm adding to my state of prayerfulness by acknowledging God as the originator of that for which I am thankful.

friday SEPTEMBER 7

Exploration Called to Action
Rom. 12:17-21; Gal. 5:22-26

Stephanie Yamniuk, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

CONCLUDE

Paul’s letters of encouragement to Thessalonica remind them to be a church that is wise and that follows God’s instructions. He also reminds them to be a church that reaches out to others. Help the poor. Feed the hungry. Live in peace with others, and encourage each other. This should all be part of the church’s focus. The church does not belong to us; it belongs to God. Part of the outreach God expects of us is planting new churches and raising new leaders. There are expectations for leaders in the church, all of which revolve around action and respect for everyone.

CONSIDER

- Gathering some friends to serve breakfast at a homeless shelter.
- Creating a jigsaw puzzle with the fruit of the spirit and sharing it with the junior or earlitteen class. Spend some time talking to them about why it’s important that we have the fruit of the spirit.
- Developing a survey and interviewing people at a mall. (Be sure you get the proper permission to do so.) Ask questions about what characteristics people expect church leaders to have, and ask them to list things they believe church leaders should do to make a positive difference in their community.
- Writing in your journal about how feeling closer to God can make you a better disciple and can help you to be more effective at telling others about what God is doing for you.
- Re-enacting a Bible story about revenge, emphasizing trust in God’s judgment.

CONNECT

Matthew 5:43-48; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22; 1 Peter 4:7-9.

Steps to Christ, “The Test of Discipleship”; Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers, no. 6, p. 31.

Lesson Eleven SEPTEMBER 8-14

Promise to the Persecuted

"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 Thess. 1:11, ESV).

Sabbath SEPTEMBER 8

Introduction Promise to the Persecuted

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Obed Soire, Coffs Harbour, New South Wales, Australia

"Give the keys back!" my mother screamed as we ran after the drunken man who had just snatched the keys out of our car's ignition switch. I couldn't have been even eight years old, but enormous fear gripped me because I knew we were defenseless. Even more frightening was the fact that he was running into the bush, and it was raining hard. As we chased him, I kept thinking, What will we do if this man turns violent?

I knew that my mother and I were in no position to fight back. Thankfully, a man came out of nowhere, quickly caught up with the drunk, shoved him to the ground, and forced the car keys from his grip.

The situation in the Thessalonian church was not far different from what my mother and I experienced that rainy day. Because the Christians there were in constant fear of persecution, they must have occasionally felt helpless. Hence, Paul's letter.

The opening verses of 2 Thessalonians 1 seek to comfort the church members. In these verses, Paul draws their attention to two facts. First, their suffering will not last forever. God is keen to intervene and bring their suffering to an end. Second, those who were causing pain to the followers of Christ would in due time receive trouble of their own. God's message of justice is a message of love. God is never aloof from His children when they are being persecuted.

The persecution suffered by the Thessalonian church may not be similar in every facet to the persecution Christians face today. However, we all have experienced some form of injustice at one time or another. The message of this week's study is this: God will end persecution, and His children who suffer at the hands of others will receive justice. Therefore, we need not harbor hatred in our hearts against those who persecute us.

Sunday SEPTEMBER 9

Logos A Vindication of God and His People

John 1:18; John 14:1-3; Rom. 2:5; Rom. 12:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12; Rev. 16:4-7; Rev. 20:1-6

Elvis Mogoi, Wilmington, Delaware, U.S.A.

To a people who are persecuted for the sake of Christ, Paul writes words that provide a hope for relief, a promise of justice, and an understanding of how current issues fit into the great picture.

Don't Be Afraid (John 1:18; 2 Thess. 1:1-4)

Paul begins with a greeting that endears the persecuted Christians in Thessalonica to God their Father for whom they are being afflicted. The apostle John reminds us that we gain a knowledge of God through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:18). Knowing that God is their Father and Protector, that He is fair and cares for them, is essential to the hope that the Thessalonian Christians must have. Paul speaks to them about God's grace and peace, His love in action—a love that yields for them a certain tranquility in the midst of their affliction.

The Thessalonians' experience can be ours. Our trials also offer opportunities for us to see God's love at work in us and for us. Then, when we recognize His love, we have peace of heart and mind—a peace that is a trademark of Christ's followers.

Suffering Bears Fruit (2 Thess. 1:3, 4, 11)

There is something praiseworthy about the Thessalonians as they experience persecution. That something is their endurance. Paul is not rejoicing that they are suffering. He is rejoicing that despite their suffering, they are faithful in Christ. They are not bitter but are growing in faith and love. They are not suffering just for the sake of suffering. Instead, their suffering is bearing spiritual fruit. It is worth noting that their suffering does not cause separation among them. Instead, their love for each other increases during this time of difficulty.

A Promise of Relief (John 14:1-3; 2 Thess. 1:5, 10-12)

The endurance the Thessalonians display during their trials vindicates God. It shows that God's grace enables His people to remain strong under difficult circumstances. Furthermore, their endurance is a response to God's power. They value the One in whom they have believed, and they are therefore sustained by Him. As they endure their trials, Paul helps them to take their eyes off the immediate and look to the promise of Christ's return (John 14:1-3).
Paul is simply saying that their suffering is not eternal and that the One for whom they are suffering will come to put an end to their suffering. Here is a promise of relief from their affliction. It is a promise we can share as we go through tough moments. We also need to be reminded that our trials are not everlasting, although at times it may seem as though they are.

The closing words of 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 give us insight into the wonderful nature of a selfless God. As Christ is glorified in them, they are glorified in Him.

A Righteous and Fair God (Rom. 2:5; Rom. 12:19; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; Rev. 16:4-7)

Paul also promises the Thessalonians justice—that evil will be brought to an end. God’s judgment is neither biased nor partial. It is not limited in understanding. His judgment is not only a judgment against actions, it is also a judgment against one’s thoughts and the motives of the heart. Thankfully, the judgment of persecutors and deniers of truth is safe only in the hands of God, for He knows all things—seen and unseen. Therefore, He is able to judge fairly. Because persecuted people are likely to feel the pressure of evil in their lives, Paul reminds the Thessalonians to take their case to God, because He only is righteous and fair.

Eternal Joy (2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 20:1-6)

To those who suffer, Paul and John give an important two-fold message:

1. Those people who thrive on persecuting Christians will incur eternal loss.
2. Christians who endure persecution will find relief and will be ushered into eternal joy.

Paul emphasizes that the Thessalonians are part of the believers whom Christ receives when He returns. Let us personalize these promises and live in the hope of being part of that same group.

REACT

1. What type of faith leads us to love others? What type of faith causes us to alienate others? What type of faith do you think you have?
2. How does God’s judgment and vengeance differ from the judgment and vengeance of human beings?

monday SEPTEMBER 10

Testimony Training for the Race
2 Thess. 1:11

Zacharia Atinda, San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A.

Several programs are available that train people to run a race. All the programs offer procedures that ensure success. Those who have used these programs testify that the participants have responsibilities to fulfill. For example, some programs will say you must drink one liter of water a day.

In writing to the church in Thessalonica, Paul shares one such training program. Two important elements in this program involve staying connected to Christ and desiring the greater good of the gospel. Ellen G. White states, “When the mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite, the effect on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate. In such communion is found the higher education. It is God’s own method of development. ‘Acquaint now thyself with Him’ (Job 22:21).” This does not imply that being involved in a church community will be easy. Nor does it imply that Christians who are cultivating new grounds for sowing gospel seeds will have an easy time.

One day, a father was training his three-year-old twin sons to ride their bikes safely on a trail. Every time they came to a steep hill, one of the two was able to continue cycling as his father shouted, “Pedal! Pedal! Pedal!” The other son was afraid of the steep hill, so he just followed along till he started going backward because he couldn’t pedal anymore. His father, walking behind him, pushed him up the hill while still encouraging him to pedal.

Our spiritual journey is full of hills and mountains we have to climb. Being connected to God in every aspect of our lives gives this journey an ever-flowing source of encouragement and hope. This does not mean that the race is going to be easy, but it does help us to focus on the prize that is promised to us (Heb. 12:1, 2).

REACT

1. If being with Jesus is your prize, and Christian living is your race, how are you training for the race?
2. Are there any valid excuses for not training? Explain your answer.

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2. How does God’s judgment and vengeance differ from the judgment and vengeance of human beings?

tuesday SEPTEMBER 11

Evidence God’s Righteous Judgment
2 Thess. 1:3-7

Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, Newark, Delaware, U.S.A.

Paul founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). Although he could not spend much time with them because he was being persecuted by other Jews, the church he left behind was very much alive and active. Even persecution from both inside and outside the church could not dampen their joy. Paul’s deep concern for this congregation prompted his second letter to them. He strengthens the faith of the believers by drawing their attention to the righteous judgment of God and the future glory that awaits all believers.

Usually, when we see people prosper who do evil against God’s people, we think God is absent, and we question His righteous judgment. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, however, had an interesting perspective. They believed that a faithful, patient response to persecution was evidence of God’s righteous judgment. Although God’s righteous judgment also involves retribution or repayment (2 Thess. 1:6), we should not forget that the righteous judgment of God begins with His people (2 Thess. 1:5). God’s righteous judgment was evident in the church at Thessalonica as increased persecution led to their growing faith and abounding love. Instead of dimming their faith, persecution was instead a refiner, burning away the dross from the gold, bringing forth a pure and precious metal.

Therefore, in the midst of persecution, our expectations should be high because God will avenge our suffering; and when Christ comes in His glory with all the angels, we will be presented before Him spotless because of His own blood shed for us.
As Christians awaiting the second coming of Christ, how should we respond to all forms of persecution both from within and from without the church?

What biblical principles help us to stand firm when we are persecuted?

**Wednesday September 12**

**How-to Christian Affirmation**

2 Thess. 1:3

**Betty and Justin Benuke, Jersey City, New Jersey, U.S.A.**

Paul had a talent for encouraging the believers he encountered on his missionary journeys. From his example, we can learn how to do the same. First of all, he took time to pray for them and to write letters to them in order to strengthen their faith. Despite the fact that communication methods were slow and he faced his own difficult times, he never despaired. In his heart, he considered the souls of believers more important than anything else.

Being new in the faith sometimes is like being a stranger in a foreign land. It can mean losing old friends, forsaking cherished practices and habits, and in some instances, even beloved family members. In addition, a new Christian must learn to live in accordance with Christian values and beliefs. In his letters to the churches, Paul encouraged Christians to meet together regularly and to encourage each other with their testimonies, kind words, and shared faith. We can do the same.

Paul's determination yielded a great harvest. Likewise, we need to nurture new believers that the Lord gives to us. Let us encourage them, pray for them and with them, and love them to let them know that they belong.

Undertaking the task of Christian affirmation is very rewarding. It makes us a part of the plan of salvation. It helps us to appreciate how God works through us despite our weaknesses. It eases our heartaches by bringing us great fulfillment. In addition to all of this, we become the salt of the earth. When people see us, they see Christ in us and long to have what we have.

We are living in the last days. The harvest is plentiful. The laborers are few. Let us go out to the highways and byways and proclaim the good news of the Second Coming. May the Lord grant us the grace and strength to do His work so that He can come and take us home.

**Thursday September 13**

**Opinion Cross or Crown?**

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12; Rev. 2:10

**Thomas Makini, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.**

Second Thessalonians 1 is full of hope and comfort to the believers: (1) Their patience and faith produces endurance (verse 4). (2) Their persecution is a token of God's righteous judgment (verse 5). (3) They have been counted worthy to inherit the kingdom of God (verse 5). (4) God will repay their persecutors with tribulation (verse 6). (5) They will be given rest from their affliction at the Lord's return (verse 7). (6) Christ will be glorified through His saints (verse 10). (7) Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy would pray that “God would count [them] worthy of this calling and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess. 1:11, NKJV).

These rewards evoke a memory of the great controversy that began in heaven between Lucifer and God. This controversy is behind all powers of darkness that perpetrate the time of trouble prior to the close of probation. Soon we are going to face the worst of what Paul is talking about. However, Jesus comforts us through John the revelator: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10, NKJV).

God is capable of using the afflictions of His saints to purify unto Himself a church with no spot or wrinkle. Persecution will rally the saints to present a united front against the devil as Jesus the Mighty Captain leads them to victory. “If we endure the suffering, if we are faithful even unto death, we are promised a crown of life. Only royalty wear crowns. Jesus is the King of kings and as heirs to the kingdom of God, we have no crown here, but we will have a cross. The cross will bring suffering and perhaps death but in God's kingdom the cross will be gone and we will receive a crown.”

**Friday September 14**

**Exploration A Fact of Life**

John 16:33

**Renee Coffee, Gobles, Michigan, U.S.A.**

During World War II, Corrie ten Boom and her family were arrested by the Nazis for hiding Jews in their home. Corrie and her sister Betsie were sent to Ravensbruck, a concentration camp in Germany. Betsie died there, but Corrie was released due to a clerical error, shortly before women her age were put to death. After the war, Corrie looked for a way to minister to others who had suffered under Nazi persecution. She opened a rest home for those
who had been especially traumatized. Through the people she cared for, Corrie learned an important lesson: Those who were able to forgive their enemies were able to return to society and make new lives for themselves. However, those who held on to their bitterness never recovered.

Persecution is a fact of life for Christians, but we can choose how to respond. We can hold on to resentment, rehearsing the wrongs done to us, or we can focus on God and His promise to set everything right when He returns. Forgiveness is not just a favor we bestow on others, it's also a gift we give ourselves.

**CONSIDER**

- Designing a poster based on 2 Timothy 1:7, “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”
- Memorizing a Bible passage, such as Psalm 91:1-16, that assures us of God's promise to be with His people in all situations.
- Researching the subject of religious persecution. Where can it be found today? Pray for those who are experiencing it.
- Singing the song “Until Then,” number 632 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.
- Making a list of times you have been mistreated by others. Ask God to help you let go of any resentment you still feel. Then symbolically release the hurt by either burning the list, burying it in the ground, or running it through a paper shredder.
- Interviewing someone who has experienced persecution. What advice do they give on how to respond when mistreated?
- Reflecting on what Christians should be doing now to prepare for the persecution of the last days. Journal your ideas.

**CONNECT**

*Christ's Object Lessons,* “The Measure of Forgiveness.”
lesson twelve SEPTEMBER 15-21

The Antichrist

"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 Thess. 2:3, ESV).

Sabbath SEPTEMBER 15

Introduction Antichrist or anti-Christ?

2 Thess. 2:3

Brian Peters, Singapore, Republic of Singapore

'This man is the antichrist!' or so claimed many sensational Web sites just when the elections had reached a fevered pitch. Of course, this person wasn't the first person to be singled out as the one who would "exalt himself over everything that is called God" (2 Thess. 2:4, NIV), and he certainly won't be the last. It seems these days that just as soon as any individual rises to power, there's a group of people waiting to educate us on how the particular alignment of stars on this person's birth date clearly shows that he is the prophesied antichrist. In some cases, it's the precise number calculated from the letters in their full name that adds up to exactly 666, give or take a few vowels. For as long as the Bible has talked about the antichrist, there have been people pointing this way and that saying, "Yes, this one surely is! It's unmistakable!"

Nevertheless, could we have been missing the point the entire time? John warned in 1 John 2:18 that the antichrist was coming and also that many antichrists had already come. How could this be, since he wrote this almost two thousand years ago? Haven't we all been waiting for that one solitary figure to rise up and prove our worst fears? John then goes on to explain that the antichrist is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22).

Hmmmm! It looks like it's time to shift our paradigm a little. It's blatantly easy to point at one person and say that that person embodies the denial of Jesus Christ, while forgetting that our other three fingers are pointing back at us. If John correctly explained that anything denying Jesus is the antichrist, then we need to take a closer look at our own lives. Do the words coming out of our mouths exalt Christ or deny Him? Do our actions show the humility He embodied in His time on earth? Or do they deny His instructions on how to live? Shifting the blame and spreading sensationalist rumors are easy, but examining our own lives to find out where we ourselves have denied Christ is not as easily done.

I encourage you then, to join us this week as we learn about the antichrist. After all, it's easy to get confused if we keep looking at everything that denies Christ. The simplest solution, then, would be to focus on everything that exalts Him!

Evidence Deception Then and Now

2 Thess. 2:9, 10

Christon Choo, Singapore, Republic of Singapore

Thessalonica was the capital of a part of the province of Macedonia. Its population was approximately 200,000. The Egnation Way, a major route between Rome and the Orient, went through Thessalonica. This route and the city's seaport made Thessalonica one of the most prosperous centers of the Roman empire.

First and Second Thessalonians were written in a.d. 51 as letters to the church of Thessalonica. Unlike some of the other places Paul and his friends visited, their first contact with the Thessalonians was not pleasant. For the first three Sabbaths, they shared with them scriptures about Christ. They convinced some Jews and many Greeks that Christ was the Messiah risen from the dead. However, other Jews became jealous of them and formed a mob to riot and chase them away (Acts 17:1-9).

Paul wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians because he could not stay with them to help them grow as Christians. These letters encouraged the new converts and corrected some misunderstandings that they had regarding the Second Coming and how they should live until Jesus returned.

Paul's message to the Thessalonians, though written almost two thousand years ago, is just as relevant today. Like Thessalonica of the past, the world today is a melting pot of cultures and ideas, and it's easier than ever to be deceived by someone claiming to be God. However, the Bible makes it clear that two things will happen before Jesus comes again. First of all, there will be a rebellion. While 2 Thessalonians does not give details, Jesus makes it clear that during this rebellion many people will turn away from God. There will also appear many false christs and prophets, who will perform what appear to be miracles so realistic that if it were possible, even God's people would be deceived (Matt. 24:4-25). Many people actually will be deceived and follow after them.

Paul clearly warns us that unless we know the truth, we will believe such lies (2 Thess. 2:11, 12). Satan is crafty and will convince many people to follow him. However, if we delight in the truth and study God's words carefully, we will not be deceived by his lies.

REACT
Do you know the Bible well enough to not be deceived in the last days?

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monday SEPTEMBER 17

Logos Beware: The Antichrist Wants to Be Your Friend

Dan. 8:8-11; Zech. 3:1; Matt. 24:1-14; Acts 2:22; 2 Thess. 2:1-12

James Tham, Singapore, Republic of Singapore

Lies, Rumors, and Panic (2 Thess. 2:1-12)

The Thessalonian Christians were in a state of disarray. Based on what Paul wrote to them in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, it seems that someone had been spreading rumors that Christ’s return was just about to happen. So, like a worried father, he wrote to tell them not to be disturbed (2 Thess. 2:2). Perhaps Paul didn’t know how the rumor started, but he surely wasn’t going to let it continue. So he reassured the Thessalonians by telling them that Christ “will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3, NASB).

Unmasking the Man of Lawlessness (Dan. 8:8-11; 1 John 2:18, 19, 22)

To prevent other rumors from arising, Paul gave the Thessalonians a key that would unlock the mystery of when Christ would return. He would return after the man of lawlessness was revealed.

Who is this man of lawlessness? He will masquerade as Christ by trying to do the work only Christ can rightfully do. He will be a pseudo-messiah, 1 a fake Christ. The apostle John would echo this idea of a fake Christ. He used the term “antichrist” to describe such a character. In Greek, anti means “against” or “instead of.” 2 John wrote that there is more than one antichrist. “Even now many antichrists have appeared” (1 John 2:18, NASB).

Hidden Agenda (Matt. 24:1-14, 24; Acts 2:22)

What are the antichrists trying to achieve? Jesus tells us that before He comes, “many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am Christ,’ and will mislead many” (Matt. 24:5, NASB). Although, there are and will be many antichrists, they are united in purpose. That purpose is to mislead us. Empowered by Satan, they will do all they can to deceive us. They will lie, spread rumors, and cause panic. Ultimately, they want to deceive everyone into thinking that they are God, or Christ, or that they are speaking on behalf of them.

Modern science can be an antichrist in that it offers answers about our origin that negate God’s role in our creation. It claims to have the answers about how the world came to be. Thus it exalts itself “above every so-called god or object of worship” (2 Thess. 2:4, NASB). Is the final say in your life God and His word, or something else?

Philosophies also are antichrists in that they give us a multitude of choices regarding our purpose and destination in life. We may not realize it, but many philosophies have subtly distracted us from looking forward to Christ’s return. We are taught to rely on ourselves, make the best of our life now, and to find the god within us. In fact, philosophy in general may have become the most popular and trusted god of our time without many of us realizing it.

Materialism promises consumers happiness and satisfaction. However, research has shown that the happiest people in the world are not people with the most stuff. Nevertheless, many of us still have to have the latest of everything. These gadgets and gizmos become our gods.

The power of these antichrists is subtle. If we are careless, we will be tricked into making them our gods, exalting them higher than our Creator. How can we prevent ourselves from being deceived? How can we spot the difference between the antichrists and Jesus Christ?

Spot the Difference (2 Thess. 2:5, 8)

People who work with money are trained to recognize the genuine from the counterfeit by studying the genuine. They become so familiar with the real item that when they do receive a counterfeit bill, they recognize it immediately. The same principle applies to the true Christ and the antichrists. We must become so familiar with the real Christ that when an antichrist tries to fool us, we will have no doubts. Paul advises us that if we do not want to be deceived by the antichrists, we must “receive the love of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:10, NASB).

Jesus says that He is the truth. He also points to the Bible as truth. How much time are you spending with Jesus and His Word? Do you know them well enough that as soon as you come into contact with counterfeits you would recognize them immediately? Dedicate yourself to loving the truth—the Living One and the written one. And beware, because the antichrist wants to be your friend.

REACT

1. How do you see the antichrists’ work affecting you and your relationship with God?

2. What is distracting you from dedicating yourself to the Living Word and the written word?

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tuesday SEPTEMBER 18

Testimony Where Will You Stand?

1 John 2:22, 23

Jeffrey Lonan, Singapore, Republic of Singapore

“Marvelous beyond expression is the blindness of the people of this generation. Thousands reject the word of God as unworthy of belief and with eager confidence receive the deceptions of Satan. Skeptics and scoffers denounce the bigotry of those who contend for the faith of prophets and apostles, and they divert themselves by holding up to ridicule the solemn declarations of the Scriptures concerning Christ and the plan of salvation, and the retribution to be visited upon the rejecters of the truth. They affect great pity for minds so narrow, weak, and superstitious as to acknowledge the claims of God and obey the requirements of His law. They manifest as much assurance as if, indeed, they had made a covenant with death and an agreement with hell—as if they had erected an impassable, impenetrable barrier between themselves and the vengeance of God. Nothing can arouse

their fears. So fully have they yielded to the tempter, so closely are they united with him, and so thoroughly imbued with his spirit, that they have no power and no inclination to break away from his snare."

“The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony every statement and every miracle must be tested.

“Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word: they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?”

REACT

Reflect on your relationship with Jesus today and on how you can prepare for the deceptions of Satan and his agents.

1 The Great Controversy, p. 561.
2 Ibid., pp. 593, 594.

**wednesday SEPTEMBER 19**

**How-to Holding on to the Truth**

**2 Cor. 10:4**

**Faith Toh, Singapore, Republic of Singapore**

Every Christian has an enemy. Although 1 Peter 5:8 describes this adversary as a “roaring lion,” he isn’t a mythical character. Satan is real, and he wants to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10, NIV). The good news is that he has no actual authority over Christ's followers. When Jesus gave His life on the cross, He redeemed us from Satan's power. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8, NKJV).

Even though Christ broke Satan's dominion over us, it is still our responsibility to put Satan in his place, to realize and exercise the authority God has given us over the devil. Paul warned that many would fall away before Christ returns: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed” (2 Thess. 2:1-12, NKJV). So how can we see through Satan's lies and not give up on the truth? The Bible has given us some steps we can take.

Pray. David prayed for protection against deception and God heard him: “In my distress I cried to the Lord, / and He heard me. / Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips / and from a deceitful tongue” (Ps.120:1, 2, NKJV).

Study the Bible. Timothy was told to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, NKJV). The Bereans were praised because they “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11, NKJV).

Recognize false prophets. False prophets will lead people away from obeying God (1 John 4:1-3). If they preach against God's law, do not believe them (Isa. 8:20), even if they are from your church! Second Thessalonians 3:6 cautions: “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (NKJV).

REACT

1. What are some Bible study techniques you can employ to better understand and study God’s Word?

2. How can you motivate yourself to pray and study the Bible daily?

**thursday SEPTEMBER 20**

**Opinion Satan Is Not Interested in Your Opinions**

**2 Thess. 2:1-12**

**Jimmy Quek, Singapore, Republic of Singapore**

Sometimes it’s difficult to distinguish between opinion and truth. We live in an information age where much of what we learn comes from someone who learned it from someone else. When we focus more on arguing over the application of Christian traditions than we do on applying the principles found in God’s Word, Satan will succeed in diverting our attention from God's truth. Consider some of the truth Satan knows, but would like us to forget:

1. “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (James 2:19, NIV).

2. “Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (Rev. 12:12, NIV).

We all know Satan originated lies and anger, and that he works to inspire evil thoughts and doubts. He also diverts our attention from other things. It’s not enough to believe in God, because even the devils believe (James 2:19). We also need to walk in His commandments and live a life that glorifies His name (James 2:14-26). If there is one thing Satan hates, it's the name Jesus. He hates everything Jesus stands for, and he seeks to destroy all who live for Him. Satan spends all his energy devising plans to turn our eyes from Jesus. Now more than ever, we need to create a solid foundation from God’s words and walk closer with the Savior.

Satan knows his time is short and that Christ is coming back. Therefore, His main purpose is to deceive as many people as he can. He cares nothing about what school you go to, what career you choose, or what clothes you wear. He cares instead that you lose sight of heaven and that you spend less time with God. Have you ever gone to church but not worshiped? Have you “kept” the Sabbath but not communed with God during the Sabbath hours? Have you prayed but not believed? Today, focus on some of the truths you know, and live as a person who truly believes that Jesus is coming back soon.

REACT
1. What specific distractions cause you to lose sight of God's truths?

2. What can you do to live a "truthful" life?

**friday SEPTEMBER 21**

**Exploration Safe From Deception?**

*2 Thess. 2:3*

**Christy Yingling Gusse, Conroe, Texas, U.S.A**

**CONCLUDE**

Satan seeks to deceive us any way he can. One way is to get us to listen to those who have chosen to malign the character of God. Such people are antichrists. The only way to avoid their deception is to have a close connection with God and His Word. It's easy for us to point a finger at a person or thing we might think is an antichrist. But what about our own words and actions? Is it possible that we can deny Christ in subtle ways? What about giving other things in our life more value than Christ? Let's take a closer look at our priorities.

**CONSIDER**

- Organizing a Bible study with friends that will take a deeper look at warnings against deception. What does God promise His believers?
- Videotaping a skit you write and act out about how Christians sometimes make things more important than God. Ask the leader of your Sabbath School if you can play it for the others in your class. Or post it on YouTube to see what responses you get.
- Writing in your prayer journal about end-time events. List the signs you can see that Jesus is coming soon, and ask Him to protect you from deception.
- Collecting a list of statements from Ellen White and the Bible about antichrists. Group the statements together by subtopic to learn more about this concept.
- Discussing with friends what Paul means in *2 Thessalonians 2:10* when he says that we must "receive the love of the truth" (NKJV). What does "receiving the love of truth" look like in practical ways? Use Bible commentaries or study Bibles to research this phrase and its meaning.

**CONNECT**

1 John and 2 John.

*The Great Controversy, pp. 375-390; Steps to Christ.*
Keeping the Church Faithful
"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 Thess. 2:15, ESV).

Introduction Childhood Reflections

When I was seven years old, my mother would leave me to care for my three-year-old sister while she would go to get water from a nearby well. She would give me clear instructions on what to do while she was away. However, as soon as she left, I began to do exactly as I pleased. First, I would take my sister to her bed and tell her to go to sleep. Then I would go play with my friends. When my mother returned, she would find my sister alone and crying. When I would hear my mother angrily calling for me, I'd run home as fast as I could, trying to think of what I would tell her when I arrived there.

However, the bottom line was this: I was not faithful. My mother had entrusted me to take care of my sister; but I had not. The faithfulness of people is always being tested. Sometimes people fail. Sometimes they pass. Faithfulness cuts across the spectrum of human life—relationships, finances, schools, colleges, and even the church. As Adventist Christians, we have a unique message to share with the world. We are endowed with the task of being faithful stewards of this message as we patiently await Christ's return. We do this to perpetuate the mission Christ Himself instituted.

This week's lesson addresses how the church can remain faithful. Amidst the myriad challenges we face as a church, it is our privilege as Adventists to shed more rays of light into the dark trails of our world. The solidarity of Adventists around the world is a hallmark of our church. Let us never become divided. Let us never lose our way. As we study Paul's last word to the Christians in Thessalonica, let us be inspired to remain faithful until Christ returns no matter what challenges we face.

Preaching the Present Truth Message (Matt. 7:24-27)

Many people believe that change usually brings good tidings. Generally as Christians and specifically as Adventists, we need to look at change from a different perspective. How does change impact our faith and the overall nature of Christianity? The parable of the wise and foolish builders paints two contrasting scenarios. As a twenty-first-century Christian grappling with diverse changes in social, economic, cultural, and religious spheres, the test is whether or not we are effectively applying the Word of God to our lives.

What does the word of God do in you and for you? How well do other people see Christ in our actions and hear Him in our words? Do our actions match our belief? If not, we are moving with the world's tides, and we will be swept away by the currents of societal change.

Let the wise builder be our example, lest we drown in the storms that beat upon us on a regular basis.


When we love God (the first four of the Ten Commandments), we will learn to love others (the last six of the Ten Commandments). In the church, differences of opinion are likely to abound. However, when love exists among us, our actions and words will show it. If we demean the importance of love, we will lose our identity as Christians and give our denomination a bad reputation.

Our love or lack of it is seen and heard in how we settle disputes, both inside and outside the church. Another aspect of Christian love involves how we treat people in general. Christ's words and deeds emphasized that we must treat all people with love. Therefore, we can remain faithful as a church only if we have love for God and our fellow humans. Loving in a Christlike manner means that we keep no accounts against those who have hurt us, because such matters were settled by Christ on the cross. This enables us to move forward as a united family in Christ no matter where we are in the world. It also enables us to have good relationships with our neighbors and our community.

Testing the Truth (Acts 17:11)

Certain pillars of truth define the Adventist Church. We believe that the Bible is the authoritative word of God, that Jesus is our all-sufficient Savior, that the seventh-day Sabbath is a continuing reminder of His love, and that Jesus will one day return to take His followers home.
It is important to study these pillars because counterfeit truths proliferate nearly every day. Even within our own church, false teachers stir up dissent and cause people to question basic doctrines of the Bible. For these reasons, we need to know what we believe. We need to test other beliefs by God's Word. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (Isa. 8:20, NIV).

Unlike the Jews in Thessalonica, the Berean Jews, who in "their readiness to look at what was proposed as truth," checked what they heard against the Old Testament Scriptures. The Bible is to be the testing ground for all doctrines. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV).

The challenges we face as we wait for Christ's second coming are many and varied. However, in our hearts, we know God has called us to the noble task of telling the dark world the truth as it is in Jesus. The work of keeping the church faithful until Christ returns depends upon our willingness to walk in the footsteps of Christ, who is our example.

In order to achieve this degree of loyalty, we are to encourage one another and establish ourselves in every good deed and word. Christ can return at any time. But should that make us leave every good thing we are doing right now and just wait? No. Our continued good deeds are part of what it means to be faithful to the truth. In addition to this, we need to pray without ceasing, be steadfast in our belief, and live according to God's holy law of love.

**REACT**

1. How does doing good draw others to the truth?
2. Over what issues has our church differed? Why is it important that these issues be correctly understood?
3. How has the church kept its faithfulness throughout the ages?

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1. The SDA Bible Commentary, 1st ed., vol. 6, p. 344.

**monday SEPTEMBER 24**

**Testimony When Will Christ Return?**

**Matt. 24:36-39**

**Esther Aoko, Kisumu, Kenya**

"The church is built upon Christ as its foundation; it is to obey Christ as its head. It is not to depend on man, or be controlled by man. Many claim that a position of trust in the church gives them authority to dictate what other men shall believe and what they shall do. This claim God does not sanction. The Saviour declares, 'All ye are brethren.' All are exposed to temptation, and are liable to error. Upon no finite being can we depend for guidance. The Rock of faith is the living presence of Christ in the church. Upon this the weakest may depend, and those who think themselves the strongest will prove to be the weakest, unless they make Christ their efficiency."¹

"Teachers of falsehood will arise to draw you away from the narrow path and the strait gate. Beware of them; though concealed in sheep's clothing, inwardly they are ravening wolves. Jesus gives a test by which false teachers may be distinguished from the true. 'Ye shall know them by their fruits,' He says. 'Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?'

"We are not bidden to prove them by their fair speeches and exalted professions. They are to be judged by the word of God. 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.' 'Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err inwardly they are ravening wolves. Jesus gives a test by which false teachers may be distinguished from the true. 'Ye shall know them by their fruits,' He says. 'Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?'

"We are not bidden to prove them by their fair speeches and exalted professions. They are to be judged by the word of God. 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.' 'Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.' Isaiah 8:20, Proverbs 19:27. What message do these teachers bring? Does it lead you to reverence and fear God? Does it lead you to manifest your love for Him by loyalty to His commandments?²

Many people have left the church because they think that Christ's return has been delayed. Yet we are ever drawing near to the big event. That is why it remains important for us to continue telling others about His return.

**REACT**

1. In your community, what is happening that could make you change your mind from the message of the truth? How can you fight these changes as an individual and as a church in order to be faithful to the end?
2. How can our church prove to the world that the Spirit of Prophecy, which is part of our message, is indeed true and valid?

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1. The Desire of Ages, p. 414.
2. Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 145.

**tuesday SEPTEMBER 25**

**Evidence Remaining Faithful**

**Dan. 1:1-18; Dan. 6:1-23**

**Bob Collins, Nairobi, Kenya**

Daniel is an excellent example of faithfulness. Living as a captive in a foreign land, he faced many challenges to his faith. Yet through God's grace, he was able to remain steadfast. Because of his faithfulness, the king recognized Daniel's strengths and placed him in a position of power.

However, accepting this power was not without risk. He met heavy opposition and challenges that could have caused him to compromise his faith, to bend his principles. However, he weathered every storm. For more than six decades he retained favor in Babylon, using his God-given talents as he worked for a series of heathen kings. Yes, there were challenges. Yet he remained respectful, diligent, and above all, faithful to God.

Despite the threat of death that if anyone were to pray "to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to" the king (Dan. 6:7, NIV), Daniel continued to pray to the true God. "Decree or no decree, this man of God felt that he should continue his regular prayer habits. God was to him the source of all his wisdom and success in life. The favor of Heaven was dearer to him than life itself. His conduct was the natural result of his trust in God."³

By the time Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, he had not once compromised his faith. He would not bend even when threatened with death. Oh, that each of us could have such faith and courage. With the challenges we currently face as a church, we too need the faith of Daniel and the
determination not to defile ourselves with the sinful ways of today's world. Such faith is possible through the incredible power of prayer and the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit.

REACT

1. What are some of the major challenges and opposition our church is facing today?
2. How can we remain faithful both as individuals and as a church?
3. What role can hope in the second coming of Christ have in strengthening our faith?
4. Thoughtfully consider your prayer habits. What do the following passages of Scripture teach us about prayer? Ps. 62:8; Phil. 4:6; Heb. 4:15, 16; James 1:5, 6; 1 Pet. 4:7.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 812.

wednesday SEPTEMBER 26

How-to Maintaining Faithfulness

John 14:1

George Otieno, Mbita Point, Kenya

Seventh-day Adventist. The very name of our church refers to the Second Coming. Since the beginning of our church, the Second Coming has been one of our church's guiding lights, distinguishing it from many other faiths. Regardless of the changes we come across in society, we must never lose sight of this light. Listed below are things, that with God's help, we can do to remain faithful and focused on Christ's return.

Be vigilant. We are constantly facing changes of one kind or another that can shake our spiritual base. This calls for vigilance, so that as we continue to live in this sinful world, we will maintain our identity as God's remnant church. Insight that differentiates between good and bad changes is a must.

Be aware of God's presence. Regardless of the dilemma, let us always remember that God is by our side. Prayer, Bible study, meditating on God's Word, and service to others help us to stay connected to Him.

Never give up. Let us not grow weary of waiting for Christ to return. Let us not be like the maidens who ran out of oil while waiting for the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13). Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to supply us with spiritual oil to sustain us until our heavenly Bridegroom comes.

Rely on God's Word. “Your word is a lamp to my feet / And a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105, NKJV). As we battle with all the changes that occur in the world before Christ returns, let our decisions be guided by the constant light of Scripture.

REACT

1. How does your local church deal with negative changes in your community? How do you think the world church should deal with changes it considers to be negative?
2. Given the current state of affairs, do you think it is possible for our church to maintain its faith? Explain your answer.

thursday SEPTEMBER 27

Opinion Shall We Build on the Rock?

Matt. 7:24-27

Ann Adoyo, Kisumu, Kenya

As I write this article, I'm listening to a Christian song. I'm doing this to reflect on the earthquake and tsunami that killed more than twenty thousand people in Japan. For me personally, I've lost more than three close relatives in the past nine months. Recently, I heard my office colleagues discussing prophecies, one referring to Christ's second coming.

Based on all that is happening around us, we must ask ourselves whether or not we can remain faithful. Is our faith strong enough to withstand all the turbulent events that are occurring in the world and even at times in our personal lives? How can young people battling joblessness remain faithful? How can they trust God to take care of them?

Now more than ever, the church needs loyal men and women who will remain faithful to God, who will not be intimidated nor sell out at any price. I'm wondering what exactly I must do to be in that category of men and women who will stand firm in their faith until Christ comes.

One thing Paul warned the Thessalonians about was idleness. Idleness regarding physical and mental labor can be a deterrent to faithfulness. We need to choose Christ as our Savior and remain true to Him to the end. By shunning idle minds and idle hands and by embracing habits of persistent prayer and positive activity, we can achieve our goal of faithfulness.

I agree with Paul's advice to the Thessalonians about not being idle. Satan can quickly fill an idle mind with all sorts of evil plans and ideas. He knows that his time draws shorter and shorter as Christ's return draws nearer and nearer. Our enemy is constantly trying to mislead us. However, when we fill our minds with God's promises and truth, when we make the most of our spiritual gifts, then we will have a reason to smile when our Savior appears to take us home.

REACT

1. What steps should you personally take to ensure that your faith in Christ remains firm?
2. How should the church play its role as the torchbearer of present truth in your community and beyond? How should you personally play that role?

friday SEPTEMBER 28

Exploration Standing Firm

2 Thess. 3:5

Alan Hecht, Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

God is faithful. Humans? Not always so much. We become distracted or discouraged. Other times we just don’t want to be faithful, or we think we can take a break from faithfulness and take it up again later. Sometimes we may be confronted with ambiguous situations that seem to allow us to rationalize behavior we know in our hearts to be wrong. But as Christians, the trajectory of our lives should witness to our becoming more faithful to God and His will for us. The power to be faithful is available to us through prayer and study, the inner encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and the companionship of fellow believers. Let us never forget to avail ourselves of these.

CONSIDER

- Drawing or painting the scene brought to mind in Psalm 119:105. As you do it, think about how His Word has guided you in the past and will do so in the future.
- Thinking about the types of situations in which faithfulness to God and what you know to be right are a challenge. Plan how you can fortify yourself to meet these situations and emerge victorious, or how can you avoid them entirely.
- Finding Bible promises for those who remain faithful. Paraphrase them in your own words in either an attractive notebook or a computer file.
- Listening to or singing the song mentioned by the author of Thursday's lesson, “My Life Is in Your Hands.” Discuss the message of this song with others.
- Thinking of concrete steps you can take to put your faith into practice. For example, what ministries at your church or school can use your talents? How can your community use your talents?
- Starting a good habit, such as exercising daily. Build discipline and ask for God's help to remain faithful to that habit. If possible, ask friends to encourage you.

CONNECT

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17.


next quarter's lessons FOURTH QUARTER 2012

Growing in Christ

If you have not received a copy of CQ for fourth quarter 2012, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: The Great Controversy—The Foundation

Logos: Gen. 3:15; Isa. 14:4-21; Isa. 53:6; Ezek. 28:12-19; John 16:2; Rom. 1:20-28; Rev. 12:1-17.

Memory Text: “ ‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel’ ” (Gen. 3:15, NKJV).

Key Thought: The great controversy motif is the overarching concept that unifies Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.

Seventh-day Adventists profess a body of 28 fundamental beliefs. These beliefs have a foundation in a concept we call the “great controversy.” Each of the 28 fundamentals deals with a particular aspect of this cosmic controversy. The beliefs we’ll study this quarter make the best sense against the backdrop of the great controversy motif. This week we’ll look at some of the key points of this foundation.

Lesson 2: Revelation and the God Revealed in It


Memory Text: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1, 2, NKJV).

Key Thought: However important it is to understand the way in which biblical inspiration works, it’s more important to know the God revealed to us through that inspiration.

The key source for learning about God is the Bible. Nature teaches us some things about God. However, there are great truths we would know nothing about if they were not revealed to us in Scripture. While people can sense that a battle is being fought between good and evil, how else would they know about the great controversy were it not taught in the Bible? This week we’ll focus on two things: (1) what the Bible says about itself and how it was inspired; and (2) what the Bible teaches us about the God who inspired it.