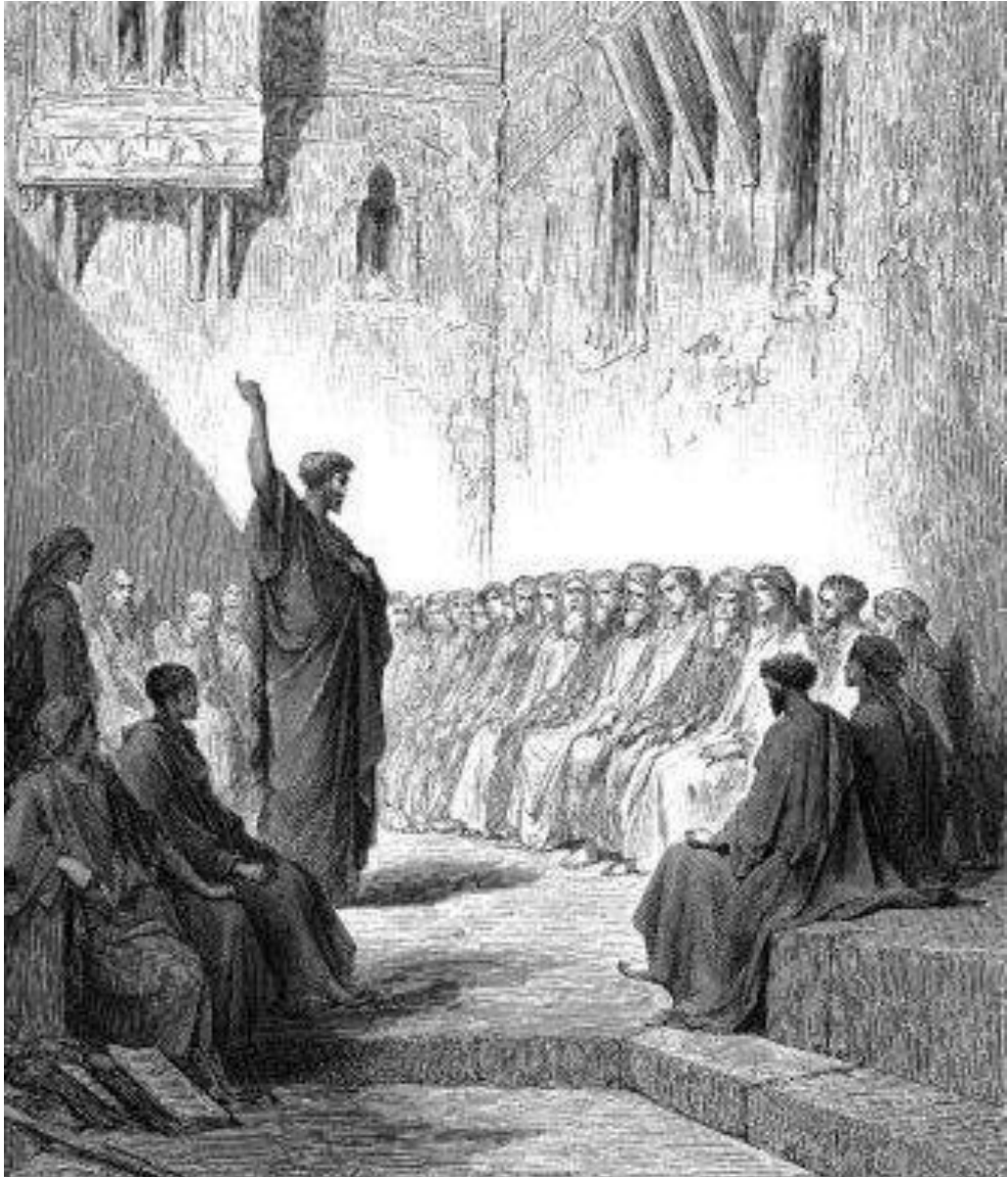


1 Thessalonians



Lynton Brocklehurst

Contents

This study series is an adaptation of a series designed for University students. The last page of each chapter study includes questions, ideas and extension exercises for those who are involved in mentoring and leading others. This distinguishes them from the questions on the third page of each study, which are general questions, suitable for everyone, including new believers. (You may treat these general questions as optional)

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1 THESSALONIANS

Overview

An Occasional Letter

1 Thessalonians is one of the many *'mini-episodes'* in God's unfolding story of the human race. God has designed the bible to be full of life and movement. We meet real people in real situations. By reading the bible we can see what it looks like when real individuals, groups and peoples relate to the living God. New Testament letters like 1 Thessalonians are sometimes called "*occasional letters*", meaning that they are written in response to a unique set of circumstances. While many of them share a broader historical context, each letter has a particular local, relational and circumstantial context. By giving us much of the New Testament in '*occasional-letter*' form, it is as if God is inviting us to find him in our own circumstances by entering into the lives and circumstances of the first believers in Jesus. And what better way to do this than by reading some personal correspondence between the people involved.

The aim is not to copy what they did. There is no direct match between us and our circumstances and the Thessalonians and their circumstances. Rather, we must let their story "inform" our story. To do this safely and well we need to gain a good basic understanding of the background to this amazing letter.

In many ways our task in this overview study is not unlike the first task of an historical novelist or film director. The novel or film will only have real impact if the characters are well researched and the story line is understandable.

At the end of this study we invite you to come up with some sort of simple presentation that can act as a starting point or hook for explaining what 1 Thessalonians is about. It could be a monologue, dialogue, poem, prose, picture, drama, sculpture, etc. Alternatively, for the more analytical among us, the creation could be a chart, illustration, timeline, outline, etc. If you are doing an artistic piece, there is room for a bit of poetic licence. Feel free to use your imagination to capture the "occasion" of 1 Thess. (More of this at the end of the study)



Paul's Second Missionary Journey



Getting into the "Occasion"

In this study our aim is to get a sweeping overview of the letter. We want to discover the writer and his purpose, the readers and their situation, the broad themes and the main issues addressed.

There are two basic ways to piece the story together:

1. By examining **the relevant bible passages** (in conjunction with translators foot-notes and brief explanatory background notes)
2. By consulting **extra biblical sources** – in particular bible commentaries, dictionaries and encyclopaedias and various internet resources.

It is a very helpful discipline to do your own work with the "primary sources" (the biblical texts) first. The work of biblical scholars is very helpful, even essential, but each scholar will have his own biases and point of view.

The Background passage in Acts

In the blank space around the passages note down important facts and insights regarding the situation at Thessalonica. What do we learn about the people involved? How do they relate to one another? What were the key events? If you like, highlight, circle, underline, and link various parts of the text.

¹ When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. ⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. ¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

IVP Bible Background commentary

17:1. Amphipolis on the Strymon, Apollonia (a day's travel beyond it), and Thessalonica (thirty-five miles west of Apollonia) were all on the Via Egnatia (16:9,12); this road continued further westward into Illyricum (Ro 15:19), but Acts reports only Paul's turn to the south, off this road, to Berea (17:10). Roads were usually no more than twenty feet wide, but they were better and safer than most European roads before 1850, and especially inviting to those who traveled on foot or with donkeys or mules.

Thessalonica was an important city in this period, Macedonia's largest port, capital of its old second district and now residence of the provincial governor.

17:2-3. Thessalonica's non-Greek religious importations included not only Judaism but the Egyptian cult of Serapis and Isis. Paul had to be there long enough to receive support from Philippi (Phl 4:15-16), about a hundred miles away; until then, his occupation, which would allow him to set up shop in the agora, must have supported him (1Th 2:9).

17:4. Macedonian women had earlier gained a reputation for their influence, which they probably still exercised in this period. As patrons within church or synagogue, upper-class women could also enjoy higher status than was available to them in society at large due to their gender. Social conditions thus made it easier for well-to-do women than for men to convert.

17:5. The idle unemployed of the marketplace could be stirred to mob action, as other ancient examples attest. Jewish inhabitants were a small minority in Thessalonica, so those Jews whom Paul did not persuade (v. 4) would need help to oppose Paul effectively. "The people" (KJV, NASB, TEV) means the citizen body (cf. "assembly" - NRSV); as a "free city," Thessalonica's gathered citizen body performed judicial functions.

17:6. Jason was a common Greek name but was also common among Hellenized Jews, as inscriptions and business documents alike testify. He is probably a Jewish host with whom Paul and Silas stay while working there. *Delatores*, or accusers, were necessary to open a case under Roman law.

17:7. Romans could understand proclaiming another king (i.e., the Messiah — v. 3) as treason against the majesty of the emperor; they could take mention of signs indicating this new ruler's coming (see 1-2 Thessalonians) as predictions of the current emperor's demise, and such predictions violated imperial edicts. That Jesus had been crucified on the charge of sedition only lent further credibility to the charge against Paul and his associates. Citizens who pledged loyalty to Caesar also pledged to report any possible treason. Like John, Luke likes to show the denseness of the gospel's opponents; cf. 17:18.

17:9. As their host (v. 6), Jason is held responsible for their actions and required to post bond for them, as if they were members of his household. A fine was a lenient penalty as far as Roman courts went, and a bond to curtail troublemakers would not have been unusual. But given the charge (v. 7), had Paul himself been caught, he might not have been so fortunate. The politarchs' decision would stand till they left office (cf. 1Th 2:18).

the letter itself

Read the whole letter quickly two or three times, maybe on different occasions. Put yourself in the shoes of the writers, then in the shoes of the recipients. Each time jot down your observations. This is not detailed verse by verse study. That comes later in the chapter studies. Here the aim is to continue to gather more basic information about the writer, recipients, purpose, content and situation.

(Where you have particular questions you may find helpful information in translators footnotes – eg. NIV footnotes are excellent, or by consulting the IVP Bible Background notes which are used throughout this study series alongside the passage in each study)

The People Involved – what do you learn about the writer(s) and recipients?

The Situation – historical, cultural, circumstantial

The Reason(s) for the letter

The Content – themes, key words, form, structure, style of writing

Supplementary sources

Gather further information on the background of this letter by consulting supplementary resources.

Some suggested sources:

- Bible commentaries
- NIV Study Bible Introductions and textual notes
- www.nextbible.org, www.e-sword.net, www.biblegateway.com

On the next two pages we have included the full text of the introduction to 1 Thessalonians from the *Navigator LifeChange Series*. You may want to use a highlighter to mark things of particular interest.

Thessalonica

The poet Antipater called Thessalonica the "mother of all Macedon." Strabo, the Greek geographer of the Augustan Age, described it as Macedonia's most populous town and the metropolis of the entire province. Indeed, with a population of over 200,000, Thessalonica was widely considered a city to be reckoned with, economically, politically, and militarily.

When the Apostle Paul traveled throughout Macedonia on his second missionary tour, he encountered a land of high mountains, broad rivers, and fertile valleys. This area of the world boasted rich farm land and timber, and was well known for its extensive deposits of silver and gold,

Thessalonica had flourished for hundreds of years, largely because of its ideal location on the banks of the Thermaic Gulf near the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea. It was one of the main sea ports in the provinces of Greece and Asia, and was accordingly considered a leading shipping and naval center. Thessalonica enjoyed another advantage. The Egnatian Way, the main Roman road from Rome to the Orient via Byzantium (modern Istanbul), passed right through the city.

These factors put Thessalonica in direct contact with many other important cities by both land and sea. It is no wonder that this thriving metropolis achieved commercial dominance throughout this part of the world.

The historical roots of Thessalonica go back to 315 BC when Cassander built it near the site of an ancient city called Therma (named for the hot springs in the area). He chose this location because of its ideal proximity to other cities. After laying the foundation of the new city, he affectionately named it after his wife, Thanica, who was a half sister of Alexander the Great. Cassander was a Greek general under Alexander.

Many years later (around 168 BC), the Romans conquered the area and divided Macedonia into four districts. They named Thessalonica the capital of the second district. Still later, when the Romans made Macedonia a province in 146 BC, Thessalonica became the seat of provincial administration. Then in 42 BC, Thessalonica received the status of a free city from Anthony and Octavian (later called Caesar Augustus) because the Thessalonians had helped them defeat their adversaries, Brutus and Cassius. From this time forward, the Thessalonians were given the privilege of ruling themselves. They did this by means of five or six "politarchs" (city rulers), a senate, and a public assembly.

Paul: a transformed missionary

Paul was a missionary for much of his life, both before and after his conversion to Christianity. He was a Jew by birth, but his education was far from what a normal Jew would have received. His learning encompassed not only the Pharisaic approach to the Jewish law but also the Greek disciplines of rhetoric and classical literature. As a Pharisee, he believed that God had set him apart to study and live by the Torah (the law of Moses), and like a good Pharisee, he expected a Man to arise who would liberate Israel from the grip of Roman domination. Accordingly, when some Jews began saying that Jesus (who obviously hadn't overthrown Rome) was this predicted Messiah, he stood against them with a vengeance!

In a sense, Saul (Paul's Jewish name) became a zealous anti-Christian missionary. His first appearance in the New Testament is that of a persecutor of the church of Jesus Christ. He officiated at the stoning of Stephen; he imprisoned every Christian he could get his hands on in Jerusalem; and he even made "missionary trips" to areas outside of Palestine to bring back believers in Christ who had fled for safety (Acts 7:58-8:3, 9:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Philippians 3:6). His mission was to stop the spread of Christianity.

It was on such a trip to Damascus that Saul had a blinding encounter with Jesus Christ. This event, which took place around AD 35, led him to turn from Pharisaism to a devoted obedience to the living and resurrected Christ. He ended up joining those he had been persecuting! Formerly he was a missionary against the church of Christ. Now he became a missionary par excellence for the cause of Christ.

After his conversion to Christianity, Paul engaged in three great missionary tours. His second missionary tour took place around AD 49 (about fourteen years after his conversion) and brought him to several important cities, including Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus.

Paul Visits Thessalonica

Upon arriving in Thessalonica, Paul at once set himself to his usual activities of soul-winning and earning a livelihood. He found a friend in a certain Jason, who was apparently one of Paul's earliest converts in the city. Jason provided his home as a base of operations for Paul and his missionary companions. Once settled, Paul probably went to work immediately making tents to earn money as he had done in other cities, for later in his letters to the Thessalonians he reminded them that he had worked "night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you" (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

When the time came to preach the gospel, Paul followed his normal custom of first going to the local Jewish synagogue, where he knew he would find people who held a great deal in common with him: a mutual respect for the Old Testament, theological concepts, and cultural practices. In his thinking, this was where he stood the greatest chance for success.

As a trained teacher, Paul was allowed to speak in the synagogue. According to Luke, his main message to the Thessalonians consisted of two points: (1) the Old Testament taught a suffering, dying, and resurrected Messiah; and (2) these predictions were fulfilled in Jesus Of Nazareth (Acts 1:7).

Paul's mission met with immediate success, and many believed, both Jews and Greeks. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 indicates that many of his Greek converts were former idol-worshippers. Most people in the ancient world worshiped natural forces and human drives, conceived of as gods who could be portrayed in wood, stone, or metal. Sexuality was a strong feature of pagan worship, and Paul found it necessary to address this very issue in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. The pursuit of religious ecstasy through sex was a hard habit to break.

The core of this young church was no doubt made up of "God-fearers," a Jewish term for Greeks who attached themselves in varying degrees to the Jewish worship and way of life without as yet becoming full converts. To become a full convert involved circumcision for males, but Greeks viewed this rite as a repugnant mutilation of the body. Paul's message included all of the attractive elements of Judaism without the unattractive ones.

These God-fearers were openly dissatisfied with pagan morality and were already drawn to Jewish ethical teaching. They were also impressed by Jewish monotheism. Yet in spite of their attraction to Judaism, they disliked its narrow nationalism and ritual requirements. Christianity did away with these objections, and provided a loftier concept of God as well as a nobler ethic centered in the person of Jesus

Christ. Paul's Christ welcomed all races, in contrast to Jewish exclusivism. This group of Greeks provided Paul with fertile soil on which to plant the seeds of the gospel in this Thessalonian synagogue.

Persecution begins

Because many were converting from Judaism to Christianity, the Jewish leaders saw Paul's message as a serious threat. They hired troublemakers to spread false accusations about him and his associates. A mob ended up storming Jason's house. But failing to find the missionaries, the mob dragged Jason before the politarchs. Jason was charged with harboring treasonous revolutionaries. These revolutionaries were supposedly teaching the people to disobey Roman law and to follow a king other than Caesar.

The politarchs saw through the motives of these Jewish zealots and required only that Jason guarantee that the missionaries would not disturb the city's peace any longer. Paul and his friends chose to leave Thessalonica to avoid further trouble.

Paul's first letter to Thessalonica

Upon leaving Thessalonica, Paul, Silas, and Timothy proceeded about forty miles west along the Egnatian Way to Berea. They ministered in this area for a short time until some of the hostile Thessalonian Jews tracked them down and incited the Berean Jews to expel them from their city.

Paul accordingly headed for Athens while Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. After arriving in Athens, he immediately sent a message back to his companions in Berea asking them to join him, which they did (Acts 17: 10-15, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5).

When they met up again, Paul was so concerned about the Thessalonian converts that he decided to send Timothy back to Thessalonica in order to check on their welfare. The circumstances of his hasty departure had meant his new converts would be exposed to persecution for which they were scarcely prepared. Paul simply had not had sufficient time to give them all the basic teaching he thought they required.

After revisiting Thessalonica, Timothy rejoined Paul at his next stop, Corinth, with encouraging news (Acts 18:1,5; 1 Thessalonians 3:6-7). In spite of heavy persecution, the Thessalonians were standing strong in their new faith. But Timothy's report also indicated that they were experiencing some problems for which they needed instruction from Paul. They sent questions back to Paul via Timothy, and Paul responded by writing a letter to them from Corinth. The letter is simply addressed to "the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

Creative presentation of "the occasion" of the letter

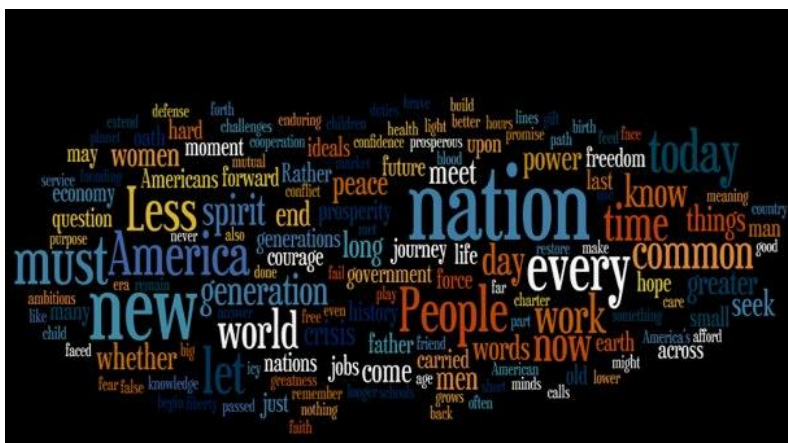
On the top half of the next page come up with some way to capture and communicate what 1 Thess is about. As we mentioned in the introduction you will want to do this in a way that works for you. You can take anything from a "fine-arts" approach to an "engineer's" approach.

Some possibilities: A picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, drama, monologue, dialogue, poem, sculpture, analogy, chart, timeline, diagram, outline, etc. Whatever suits you, just let your creativity flow.

Your creation needn't be particularly comprehensive but people looking at (listening to?) what you have produced, along with your explanation, should gain a fair idea of what 1 Thessalonians is about.

A simple example of creatively capturing the occasion of a text is the "word-cloud" of Barak Obama's inaugural presidential speech. http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/tag_clouds_of_obamas_inaugural_speech_compared_to_bushs.php

For 1 Thessalonians you could create a word-cloud (<http://www.wordle.net/>) to use as a starting point for explaining the "occasion" of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians.



My creative presentation

Prayer for this study series

Now that you have a fair idea of what 1 Thessalonians is about, take a moment to pray. For the weeks of study ahead, ask God to, “open (your) eyes to see the wonderful truths in (his) instructions (Psalm 119:18)”. Can you see any ways this letter connects with your own situation? Write down any themes and issues which seem particularly relevant. Invite God to teach you and develop you in these areas.

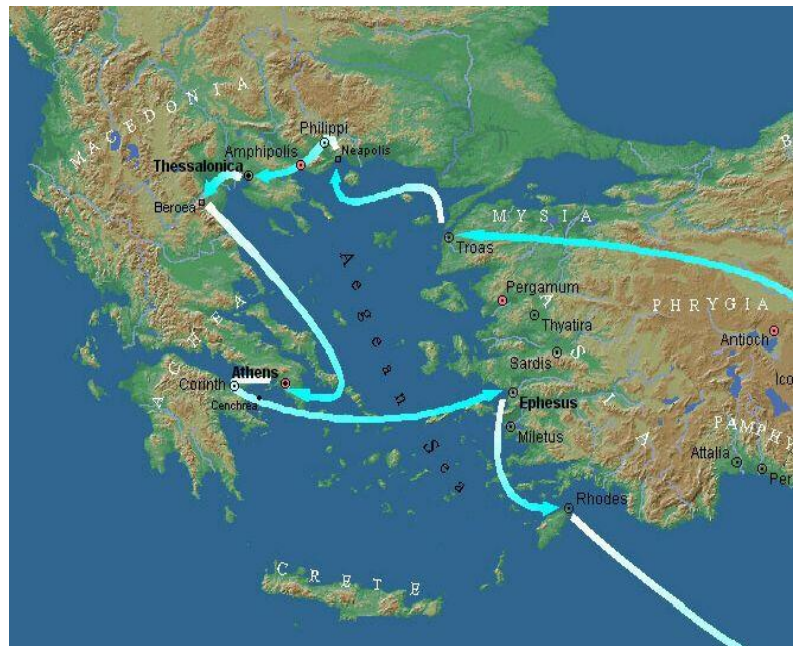
1 THESSALONIANS 1

Why was this letter written?

This important letter is one of the earliest Christian documents. It was written before the gospels (with the possible exception of Mark), and predates the Book of Acts and all other New Testament writings. Because of this, the letter gives us a fascinating insight into the very beginnings of Christianity.

The Thessalonians' story began with Paul, Silvanus and Timothy arriving at the Jewish synagogue. As a Pharisee, and a highly educated Jewish teacher, leaders of the synagogue invited Paul to speak. Paul had great credentials as a scholar, and was warmly welcomed, but as he began to speak initial curiosity gave way to hostility. It became clear he had a message that was very different to standard Jewish teaching. He talked about Jesus of Nazareth being the long awaited Messiah. He spoke of Jesus' death as a sacrifice for sin. He announced that Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit made possible an entirely new way of living. There was immediate response from many locals but things quickly turned sour when hard-line Jews tried to shut

the whole thing down. Under threat of violence Paul and his friends left town. Paul wrote this letter some months later, from Corinth, encouraging the fledgling church to continue on strongly despite the opposition.



Paul's Second Missionary Journey

How did Paul come to visit Thessalonica?

The genesis for all this was an historic prayer session at the first Christian mega-church, in Antioch (see Acts 13:1-4). Things were really rocking at Antioch, the message of the gospel impacting the whole city. Believers were first called Christians at Antioch. They had a very good, successful, exciting thing going. Imagine the stir when the very top leadership of the church suddenly announced they were off; that God had called them to head out east, without any fixed itinerary. It probably came as a bit of a surprise, but when you think about it, something like this was inevitable. Before he left, Jesus clearly said, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"*. The Holy Spirit is an out-going missionary Spirit, always moving people out of their comfort zone to reach people with the GoodNews. He chose the senior leaders of the church at Antioch with the task of taking the gospel to central Europe and beyond. Over the following years Paul and his friends made several trips to surrounding districts, spreading the gospel. It was during his second trip that he and his friends arrived at Thessalonica. Check out Acts 17:1-11 to see what happened.

What to look for in this chapter

Note the signs of true conversion in this chapter. Check out how the visiting evangelists and teachers operated.

Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, events.

^{1,1} Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.

² We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.

³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵

because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what happened when we visited you. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions.

Try This:

Use the "Detective Questions" to get into the passage and the situation:

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

Try this:

List several important facts about the Thessalonians believers from Acts 17:1-11. Check out www.en.wikipedia.org for additional background info about Thessalonica.

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?

What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?

How could you respond?

Try This

Select a sentence that seems to be speaking to you.

Read it slowly several times, each time **emphasising a different word**. Note down your thoughts.

Background

From IVP Background Commentary.

1:1. This was the standard way to open a letter. “Silvanus” is Silas's Latin name as a Roman citizen; a Jewish Roman citizen's parents often chose for their child Jewish and Latin names that sounded similar.

1:3-4. “Chosenness” (v. 4) was a term the JEWISH people applied exclusively to themselves; Paul applies it here to a church that includes many GENTILE converts.

1:6. Philosophers often called on students to imitate them, but Paul claims that they have already begun to do so. The common Jewish association of the Spirit with divine inspiration might suggest inspired or even ecstatic joy (perhaps in jubilant worship), although the Spirit was associated with other activities as well. Most of pagan culture reacted angrily to Jewish people's converting pagans from the religion of their ancestors; because a greater percentage of Christians were converts from Gentile backgrounds, they would face still greater hostility.

1:7. Achaea, south of Macedonia, was well aware of events in that nearby province.

1:8. Travelers usually carried news with them, and the other churches may have heard of the Thessalonians through the Philippian messengers, also from Macedonia, who brought Paul support (2Co 11:9; Phl 4:15-16), or through any other Jewish or Christian travelers. Cf. Ps 19:4.

1:9. Jewish texts often described the radical change required of pagans converting to Judaism in terms like those Paul uses here; the Roman writer Tacitus also criticizes Judaism for making proselytes despise the gods and so reject their own countries and families. Foreign religions could become accepted in Thessalonica, however. Among major cults in Thessalonica were the Egyptian cults of Serapis and Isis, as well as those of the more traditional Greek gods like Dionysus; some of the upper class sponsored the cult of Cabirus from the Aegean island of Samothrace.

1:10. Jesus' resurrection was the advance installment of the resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the age (which figured prominently in Jewish teaching from Da 12:1-2 onward); Jesus will thus deliver the Thessalonians from wrath at the time of their resurrection. The Old Testament often applied the term “wrath” to God's judgments within history, but this term was often extended, as nearly always in Paul and the New Testament, to the outpouring of God's wrath in the final day of the Lord, the day of judgment when, according to the New Testament, Christ returns to punish the wicked (e.g., Isa 13:9,13; 26:20; 30:27; Zep 1:18; Ro 2:5).

Questions

Paul seems convinced the Thessalonians were chosen by God? What convinced him? (How many marks of true conversion can you find in this chapter?)

Do you think it is possible to know for sure God chose you? What are your thoughts about knowing this? (check out these passages, Rom 10:13, 1 John 5:11-13, John 5:24)



What stood out about these believers as they began following Jesus? What do you think should stand out? Today when a person becomes a Christian?

How would a person know when he or she has made something an idol?

Which of the qualities that you see in the Thessalonian believers would you most wish to see developed in your life? How can the group help you with this?

Creative stuff

Use this space (reverse side for more space) to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

Extension exercises for Mentors and Leaders

What did Paul and his friends **do** for the Thessalonians?

What **goals and desires** did they have for the Thessalonians?

What **emotions** did they experience as they helped the Thessalonians?

What **content** did they communicate?

What do you learn about their **approach** – manner, principles and methods?

From this study, in what ways is God encouraging and challenging you as you seek to help the people he has placed on your heart?

Something to ponder

Paul and his friends were pioneers, often starting things from scratch with a new group of people. We are not all highly mobile pioneers like Paul, but what do we learn about pioneering mission from Paul? Note Acts 17:2, See also, Acts 16:13, 17:17; Acts 20:18-2; 1 Cor 9:19-22. Also, consider how Jesus began with his disciples, John 1:35-51.

Do you think there is a place for pioneering initiatives in our city? Is there any pioneering initiative you could support?

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-9

The message and the messenger

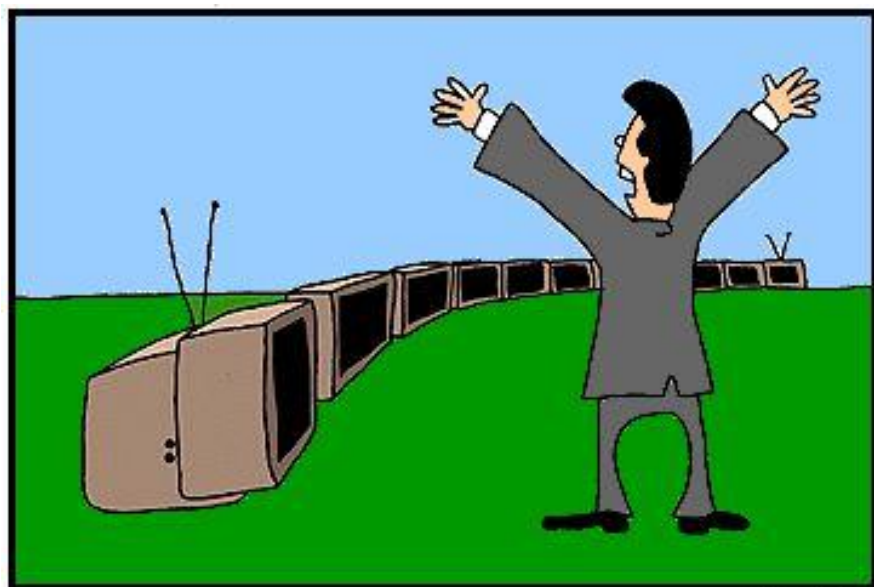
Jesus said: "beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt 7:15)

We hear a lot about dodgy pastors who develop cult followings, or run off with the church secretary. It happens today and it happened when Paul and his friends travelled around. (see 2 Tim 3:6, 2 Cor 11:13)

When it comes to sharing the GoodNews it is vitally important that our lives stack up with the message we bring. The reality is that we cannot really separate the message from the messenger. It is not just that the messenger validates the message; the messenger largely is the message! (see Matthew 5:16).

This means that it is not just what we say that matters, but how we relate to others. How genuine is our love and interest? Turning this around, we also must not be naive with regards to the people we learn from. Do their lives really demonstrate their message?

It is interesting that, throughout this letter, Paul takes as much time talking about how he and his friends related as he does about what they taught. In this section look for the things Paul and his friends felt were important ingredients of their relationship with the Thessalonians.



04-18-2000

WILLY WAS THE BEST TV EVANGELIST IN THE LAND

Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, and events.

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

^{2,1}You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. ²We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. ³For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶We were not looking for praise from any human being, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our prerogatives. ⁷Instead, we were gentle among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. ⁹Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

Try This:

Note everything you can about Paul's **approach** to sharing the GoodNews with the Thessalonians.

Try this:

See if you can come up with some key cross-references about false teachers. Do a word search using <http://www.biblegateway.com/topical/> or <http://net.bible.org/dictionary.php>. Alternatively use bible software like E-sword, or a concordance.

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?

What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?

How could you respond?

Try This

How does this passage speak to your **relationships** with others and especially friends who don't know Jesus – consider your motives, your manner, your actions.

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

2:1-2. Dio Chrysostom criticized false philosophers, who feared insulting treatment from the masses, and he described their speech as vain. True philosophers, he said, spoke with boldness even in the face of opposition. Paul and his companions were “insulted” (NIV, TEV) or “mistreated” (NASB, NRSV) in Philippi shortly before arriving in Thessalonica; this term means that they were scandalously treated in a humiliating manner, being publicly stripped and beaten without a hearing (Ac 16:22-23).

2:3. Spurious philosophers were charged with speaking out of error, impurity and deception. Religious and philosophical charlatans were widespread in the ancient Mediterranean, and genuine philosophers were thus at pains to distinguish themselves from the phony variety by denying these characteristics.

2:4. This contrasting style (“not . . . but”) was a common way of emphasizing the point, whether or not these exact charges had been leveled against Paul and his companions. Pleasing God rather than people was an important part of Diaspora Jewish ethics.

2:5. Paul disclaims dishonest flattery. False philosophers were often guilty of flattery, which could earn them more money by begging; demagogic politicians likewise catered to the masses, becoming “all things to all people”. But most philosophers and moralists complained that flattery was not for the hearers’ good; although one should speak gently, a true teacher ought to correct faults boldly. Contempt for flatterers is thus one of the most common characteristics of ancient moral literature (cf. also Pr 28:23; 29:5).

2:7. Well-to-do Romans often had slave or free wet nurses to care for young children, as did some, though fewer, lower-class Romans. According to the ideal of the educated Romans who could afford them, wet nurses should be educated so they could teach the young children; their most important trait, however, was their gentleness.

People in the eastern Mediterranean, where nursemaids were less frequent, often considered mothers more affectionate than fathers, although Roman culture frequently emphasized mothers’ severity.

2:9. The Christians in Philippi had sent him funds while he was in Thessalonica (Phl 4:15-16), but Paul still had to labor as an artisan. Because he could have set up shop in the marketplace, he could have done work and gained customers even if he was there only a brief time (Ac 17:2). Many Jewish teachers in this period had another trade besides teaching, often learned from their fathers.

“Night and day” was a common phrase, which could mean parts of the night and parts of the day. A manual laborer began work around sunrise and could talk with visitors while working; but from the early afternoon on Paul could use his time for more direct evangelism.

Questions

From the passage, list the characteristics and qualities of someone legitimately and genuinely passing on the GoodNews to others.

Which of these qualities do you want to develop?

What do we learn from Paul about serving God under the pressure of criticism?

What really turns you off about the way some people present the gospel?

What can we learn from Paul about how to avoid these mistakes and yet still get the GoodNews across to others? See also Col 4:5-6 and 1 Pet 3:13-17

Why do you think Paul chose to support himself financially (v9) rather than live off donations from the Thessalonians? See 1 Corinthians 9:12-18

Creative stuff

Use this space (reverse side for more space) to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

1 THESSALONIANS

2:10-19

Out of sight - out of mind?

In the previous study, we learned a lot about the way Paul and his friends related to the Thessalonians while they were with them. Now, we begin to get a picture of what they were thinking and feeling when forced to part. They left the new converts in trouble and this made the parting particularly difficult. There was a lot of strife and it was clear this would continue.

This passage introduces us to some of the challenges involved in following Jesus. When we first begin to follow Jesus we will inevitably encounter misunderstanding and opposition in one form or another (2 Tim 3:12). Then, as we get involved in passing the message on, we will have the added pressure of our concern for the welfare of those who respond.

These pressures are something we have to come to terms with. In this study, and the next, try to figure out how Paul and the Thessalonians coped with this pressure. For both parties it certainly wasn't "out of sight – out of mind". Far from it! A real bond of love was formed.



Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships and events.

Try This:

Take note of the **emotional tone** of the chapter. What do you think Paul felt as he wrote these words? Underline words and phrases that seem to express strong emotion, and identify the emotions involved.

^{2,10}You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹²encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. ¹³And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. ¹⁴For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your fellow Gentiles the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone ¹⁶in 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. ¹⁷But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. ¹⁸For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. ¹⁹For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

Try this:

Develop an **Outline** for the passage. Break it into sections with a title for each section. Write sub points under each section title.

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?

What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?

How could you respond?

Try This

Select a sentence that brings to mind a person or a situation. Use the sentence to **pray for that person** or situation.

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

2:10-11. Although Romans valued the dignity of the stern father, most ancient portrayals of fathers (including Roman ones) stress their love, indulgence and concern for their children.

2:12. To new Christians who could no longer participate in the civic cult that honored the emperor in Thessalonica (1:9), God's "kingdom" may have had political overtones; recognizing their exclusive allegiance to God's kingdom would be costly).

2:13. Antiquity was replete with stories about people who rejected divine messengers, thinking them only charlatans;

2:14. The Thessalonian Christians were persecuted by others in Thessalonica, as Judean Christians were by Judean non-Christians (as Paul of all people could attest — Ga 1:13). That Paul's readers have had some problems with the local Jewish community is also likely (Ac 17:5-7); although they did not make up the majority of the church's opposition (Ac 17:8), they would account for the elaboration on Jewish opposition in verses 15,16.

2:15. The Jewish people nurtured the tradition that their ancestors had killed the prophets, intensifying the Old Testament account.

2:16. "Filling up the measure of sins" (NASB) is an Old Testament idea (e.g., Ge 15:16) also used by Jesus (Mt 23:32). In keeping with Paul's teaching elsewhere (Ro 11), "wrath has come on them to the end" (the literal translation) may mean "wrath has come on them until the time of the end" (cf. Lk 21:9,23), rather than "forever" or simply the equally natural "fully" or "finally" (cf. "at last" - NIV, NRSV, TEV). The Old Testament prophets said that after many judgments the remnant of Israel would turn with their whole hearts toward God, and then he would restore his people and bring in the new age of his rule (e.g., Je 29:11-14; Eze 34:11-31; Ho 14:4-7; Am 9:11-15).

2:17. Letters of friendship commonly expressed a longing to see the other person and often noted that they were apart only in body, not in spirit. (Today we would say, "My heart is with you.") Paul goes beyond these conventions by protesting (literally), "We were orphaned without you" (see NRSV); though emphasizing gentleness, most philosophers would have considered such language *too* passionate.

2:18. Given the geographical proximity of Paul to Macedonia, "Satan's hindering" (KJV) here must refer to some concrete obstacle preventing his return to Thessalonica — either the Jewish opposition he mentioned in 2:14-16 or opposition from city magistrates and its consequences for his friends there (Ac 17:8-9).

2:19-20. Crowns and garlands were used for rewards throughout Jewish and Greco-Roman literature of this period; not a royal crown but a victor's wreath is in view. Crowns (cf. Isa 28:5; 62:3) and garlands (cf. Isa 61:3) sometimes appeared as symbols of future reward in the Old Testament and in ancient Judaism. Paul's reward, however, is simply the perseverance of the Thessalonians themselves (cf. similarly 3Jn 4).

Questions

What do you notice about the way Paul and his friends felt about the Thessalonians, and how they related to them?

What is the significance of Paul describing his relationship to the Thessalonians as parent-child rather than say, teacher-student? (see also 1 Cor 4:15-16)

What does the image of being a father (2:11) add to the image of being a mother? (2:7)

What were some of the qualities evident in the Thessalonians lives that particularly pleased Paul? (maybe look back over chapter one and two). How did he account for these developments? 1:6, 2:13

Do you think we should expect to experience opposition as followers of Jesus?

What different sources of opposition did Paul experience? 2:1, 15, 18.

What opposition to your faith are you facing? What encourages you to persevere?

Creative stuff

Use this space (reverse side for more space) to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

Extension exercises for Mentors and Leaders

What did Paul and his friends **do** for the Thessalonians?

What **goals and desires** did they have for the Thessalonians?

What **emotions** did they experience as they helped the Thessalonians?

What **content** did they communicate?

What do you learn about their **approach** – manner, principles and methods?

From this study, in what ways is God encouraging and challenging you as you seek to help the people he has placed on your heart?

Something to ponder

In this chapter we learn a lot about following through on people who have decided to follow Jesus. It is fairly obvious that there was a lot of life-on-life contact. (see also: 2 Tim 3:10, 11; Phil 4:8, 9; Mark 3:14; John 13:35-35). What are some ways we can maximise this in modern city living? How could you have better quality time with the people you are helping?

1 THESSALONIANS 3

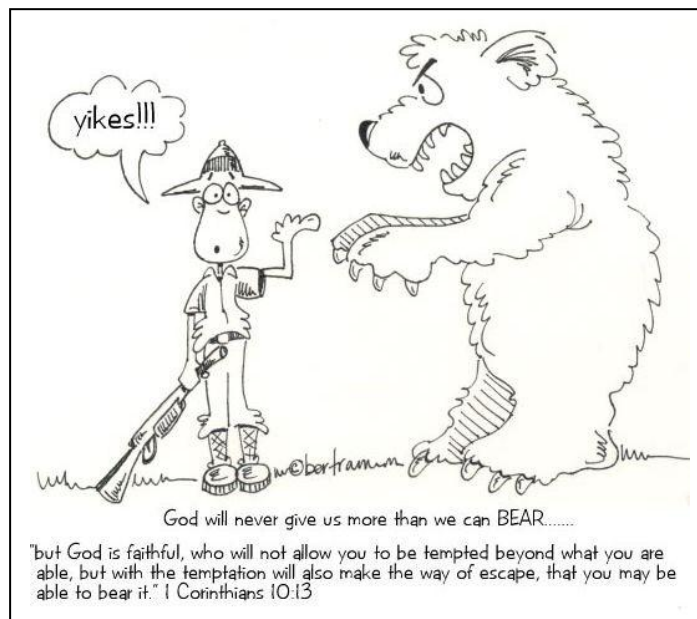
Surviving or thriving?

Perhaps we have in this section the main reason Paul is so upbeat throughout this letter. Ever since he and his friends left town Paul was worried about the new believers. Now he had received really good news from Timothy. The Thessalonians were positively thriving!

This raises some important questions for us:

Firstly, what was behind Paul's anxiety (It seems this was a common experience for him – see 2Co 11:28)? When someone feels as intensely as Paul, we know that there are some big things at stake. Try to figure out what these were.

Secondly, how come the Thessalonians were doing so well? When believers do as well as the Thessalonians when put under this sort of pressure there are powerful spiritual principles at work. Can you identify these?



Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships and events.

^{3.1} So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. ²We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we are destined for them. ⁴In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. ⁵For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labours might have been in vain.

⁶But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. ⁷Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. ⁸For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. ⁹How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? ¹⁰Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

¹¹Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹²May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³May 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.

Try This:

Look back over chapters 1-3 and list all the things Paul and his friends did for the Thessalonians

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

Try this:

See if you can come up with some key cross-references about trials and temptations. Do a word search using <http://www.biblegateway.com/topical/> or <http://net.bible.org/dictionary.php>. Alternatively use bible software like E-sword, or a concordance.

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires? What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind? How could you respond?

Try This

Use verses 11-13 to pray for some of your friends who are following Jesus

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

3:1-2. Timothy and probably Silas accompanied Paul to Athens, and he dispatched them back to Macedonia while he laboured alone in Athens.

3:3-4. Jesus, the Old Testament and some Jewish apocalyptic writers had predicted a period of sufferings just before the impending end of the age. These sufferings would accompany the gospel's proclamation (according to Jesus; cf. Mk 13:9-11) and help bring about the repentance of Israel (according to the Old Testament, e.g., Je 30:7; Da 12:1; cf. Dt 4:30; Isa 26:20-21). If this is in view here, Christians were destined to endure this suffering but were also destined to escape the wrath at the Second Coming (1:10; 5:9; cf. Ac 14:22).

3:5-8. Ancient letter writers often complained that their feelings were hurt when they did not receive letters back promptly; Paul's 'complaint' about not knowing their situation expresses affection, like that of a worried parent.

3:9-10. Most people slept during the night, and prayer during the night was a mark of special devotion in the Old Testament and Jewish literature (in the Old Testament, e.g., Ps 22:2; 42:8; 63:6; 77:2,6; 119:55,148). "What is lacking" in their faith (3:10) may be adequate hope (3:6; cf. 1:3; 5:8), which Paul seeks to supply in 4:13-5:11.

3:11. "Wish-prayers" ("Now may God . . ." addressed to those for whom the prayer is offered) were considered genuine prayers in Judaism and were offered with the expectation that God would hear them. Paul continues the motif of longing in verse 11.

3:12. Thanksgivings and prayers could introduce topics to be taken up later in the letter, especially in Paul's letters; he returns to "love" in 4:9 and to "outsiders" in 4:12.

3:13. The Old Testament, Judaism and Jesus' teaching also looked forward to a future hope that gave meaning to endurance in the present. The "saints" or "holy ones" here could refer to God's people (4:14) or to the holy angels (Zec 14:5); both were called "holy ones" regularly in Jewish literature. Paul usually uses the term for the former.

Questions

If someone were to tell you that God promises a trouble-free life to those who are true Christians, how would you respond?

How much do you think we should say to new believers about the trials and temptations they may encounter? (see James 1:2-5, 1 Peter 4:12-13)

What factors do you think contributed to the Thessalonians surviving this trial of their faith so well?

What guidelines can you find in Paul's desires, concerns, actions and prayers for those who help new believers today? How can we reconcile Paul's confidence in 1:4, with his fear in 3:5?

In what specific ways have you been encouraged by someone else's faith? (3:7) Have you told them about it?

Are there some people you know whose faith is under attack? How could you help them?

Creative stuff

Use this space (reverse side for more space) to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

Extension exercises for Mentors and Leaders

What did Paul and his friends **do** for the Thessalonians?

What **goals and desires** did they have for the Thessalonians?

What **emotions** did they experience as they helped the Thessalonians?

What **content** did they communicate?

What do you learn about their **approach** – manner, principles and methods?

From this study, in what ways is God encouraging and challenging you as you seek to help the people he has placed on your heart?

Something to ponder

Clearly prayer from a distance played a huge part in the amazing things that happened in Thessalonica. (see 1:2-3; 3:10-13). What can we learn about praying for people when we are not on the spot to see and influence what is going on? (see also: Eph 1:16-19, 3:14-20; Col 1:9-12; John 17; Luke 22:32).

Are there people you could influence from a distance through prayer? What could you pray for them?

1 THESSALONIANS 4

So what's the difference?

Have you noticed how the qualities of *faith, hope and love*, introduced at the beginning of this letter ^{1 Thess 1:3} form the substance of all that follows? The first three chapters looked back at the founding of the fledgling church, and focussed on the apostle's love and the Thessalonians' faith. In Chapters 4 and 5 the focus is on the present, and on expressions of love and hope in the life of a believing community.

Firstly, in chapter four Paul encourages the Thessalonians to act differently from the rest of society in their approach to areas like marriage, work and death. In Chapter five, he turns his attention to internal relationships of the believing community.

The message is clear – the real difference the gospel makes will always be linked to these important qualities of faith, hope and love ^{1 Cor 13:13}. Everything else is superficial.



Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, events.

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

^{4,1}As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. ⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

⁸Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

⁹Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰And in fact, you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, dear friends, to do so more and more, ¹¹and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹²so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

¹³Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. ¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

¹⁵According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Try This:

Underline all the *verbs* that relate to us

Try this:

Develop an **Outline** for the passage. Break it into sections with a title for each section. Write sub points under each section title. Give the chapter an overall title. Try to keep the titles and sub points as succinct as possible. Outlining helps you identify the main ideas and see how they are connected. Maybe you could do this on the blank page at the end of this passage study.

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?

What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?

How could you respond?

Try This

You can ask these **questions** of almost any passage: Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? An error to avoid? An example to follow? A principle to apply?

Background

4:3 Sexual Immorality. In its narrow sense, the word *porneia* originally referred to sexual acts connected with the worship of sexuality in pagan rites – sex with a temple prostitute. Jews used the word for all the sexual activities practiced by Gentiles that were forbidden in Jewish law, including premarital and extramarital intercourse, adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality. We might add to the list pornography and any activities of sexual addiction, which reflect a kind of idolatry.

From IVP Background Commentary

4:11 Paul asks his readers to be inconspicuous, not monastic.

4:12 Begging on the street normally characterized only the poorest, often property-less persons; but some may have been attracted to the lifestyle of begging adopted by the Cynic philosophers.

4:13. Most pagans believed in a shadowy afterlife in the underworld and did not share the philosophers' optimism or neutrality toward death. Most pagans grieved, and Jewish and other Near Eastern peoples engaged in very cathartic grief rituals. Paul's point is that Christians do not grieve for their fellow Christians as pagans grieve, because Christians have hope.

4:14. Like many Jewish people, Paul believed that the soul lived in heaven till the resurrection of the body, and that soul and body would be reunited at the resurrection (2Co 5:1-10). Many ancient writers distinguished the upper atmosphere ("aether") where pure souls would reside, from the lowest heaven, the realm of "air." Thus Paul can speak of the Lord descending from "heaven," meaning the highest heavens (4:16), and meeting his people in the "air," the lower atmosphere (4:17).

4:15. "Word of the Lord" in this case means a saying of Jesus (cf. Lk 22:61; Ac 20:35; 1Co 7:10). Jesus spoke of his "coming" (e.g., Mt 24:27), a term that could apply to the visit of a king or royal dignitary, which was celebrated with great pomp and majesty.

4:16-17. In the Old Testament, trumpets (shofars, rams' horns) were used especially to gather the assembly or give orders for battle

The "clouds," "trumpet" and possibly "archangel" allude to a saying of Jesus about the end time (Mt 24:30-31); the meeting in the air may be inferred from the gathering to join him (Mt 24:31). The "shout" is undoubtedly the commander's shout of war (Am 2:2), an image applied to God as warrior in the Old Testament (Isa 42:13; cf. the shout of triumph with a trumpet in Ps 47:5,8-9), as is his descent (Isa 31:4; cf. Zec 14:3-4).

Questions

Paul indicates that a believer manages and expresses his/her sexuality in a markedly different way from the surrounding "pagans" (not a derogatory term!). What are some the differences inferred here?

What motivations lie behind this different approach for the believer? 1 Cor 6:13-20, Rom 12:1-2, Rom 16:19

What would you say to someone who believes you can do anything you like as long as you mind your own business (4:11) and no one gets hurt (4:6)? (see 1 Cor 6:12, 10:23)

How does following Jesus affect thinking and behaviour regarding work? (see also 2:9, 5:12, 14, Col 4:5-6, 1 Tim 3:7). In what other ways might a believer's approach to their work make them stand out? 1 Peter 2:18-21

How does following Jesus affect thinking and behaviour regarding death? How does this passage help you as you consider your own death? (see also Phil 1:22, 23; 2 Cor 5:1-7)

In this chapter, the areas in which we are encouraged to be distinctive are sex, work and death. Which of these areas most challenges you to be different? How?

Creative stuff

Use this space (reverse side for more space) to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

Extension exercises for Mentors and Leaders

What did Paul and his friends **do** for the Thessalonians?

What **goals and desires** did they have for the Thessalonians?

What **emotions** did they experience as they helped the Thessalonians?

What **content** did they communicate?

What do you learn about their **approach** – manner, principles and methods?

From this study, in what ways is God encouraging and challenging you as you seek to help the people he has placed on your heart?

Something to ponder

In this chapter and in the beginning of chapter 5 Paul addresses how the believer's new understanding of life should profoundly affect the way they live. He addresses the specific areas of sex, work and death. What do you think are two or three crucial areas where the people you are seeking to help could be encouraged to be different from surrounding society today? How could you address these issues?

1 THESSALONIANS 5

Life is short, party hard

The older version of this is, “eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die”.

When we move beyond just existing, and make an effort to think deeply about life, it has a huge impact on how we live. One person who discovered this was the writer of Ecclesiastes, the “Teacher”. He explored the notion that life was essentially a closed system with no certainty regarding God and the afterlife. He said, “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure” ^{Ecc 2:18}. When he had exhausted every possible source of pleasure and meaning his depressing conclusion was, “all is vanity and a striving after wind, there is nothing to be gained under the sun” ^{Ecc 2:11}. Partying hard never really delivers. It leads ultimately to exhaustion and disillusionment.

When Paul and his friends came to town, they brought an entirely different message. They spoke of a loving God who revealed himself personally in Jesus Christ. They announced there was indeed a glorious eternal future, beyond death, for those who responded to His love. More than this, they assured the Thessalonians that they could begin to experience the powers of the life to come, here and now, and they did. This was a breath of fresh air. This was a message of hope and it completely changed the Thessalonians approach to life. As we saw from chapter 4, the new approach freed them to love.

This chapter continues to fill out the picture of a community of believers who live in the light of eternity; people who know that not some horrible “end” awaits them but the return of Jesus Christ and a wonderful future with him.



Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, events.

^{5,1} Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
⁴But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.
⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.
⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
¹²Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you.
¹³Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.
¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray continually, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
¹⁹Do not put out the Spirit's fire. ²⁰Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²²reject whatever is harmful.
²³May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.
²⁵Brothers and sisters, pray for us. ²⁶Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. ²⁷I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.
²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Try This:

Underline all the *instructions* in the passage. What topics are covered?

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

Try this:

Note down a couple of things you find difficult to understand (or think could be difficult for someone else). See if you can come up with some key cross-references using <http://www.biblegateway.com/topical/> or <http://net.bible.org/dictionary.php>. Alternatively use bible software like E-sword, or a concordance

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?

What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?

How could you respond?

Try This

Memorise a verse that either you find personally helpful or you think will be useful for helping others.

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

5:2. This verse is another saying of Jesus (Mt 24:43; also used in 2Pe 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15). Paul does not mean that no signs can precede the day of the Lord (2Th 2:2-4) - only that they will not pinpoint the time or provide sufficient warning to the wicked (1Th 5:3-4).

5:3. Paul's readers in Thessalonica would take his words as an attack on claims of earlier Roman emperors to have established peace and security (*pax et securitas*) throughout the empire.

5:8. Roman guards and other kinds of night watchmen (such as shepherds) were the only people who stayed awake at night, apart from those engaging in drunken revelry. Paul's armor imagery may also reflect the standard Jewish idea of a final war preceding the end and the military imagery used by moralists concerning their struggle with the passions (see comment on Ro 13:12; cf. also comment on Ep 6:10-20).

5:9. Although "salvation" could mean "deliverance," in the context of the final salvation it would also be associated with the bodily resurrection of the righteous, as here. Judaism juxtaposed this resurrection with the wrath God would pour out on the Gentiles and disobedient Jews at his coming to judge the earth, which they expected would occur at the same time.

5:12-13. The term for those who "have charge" (NASB, NRSV) or "are over" (KJV, NIV) the Thessalonian Christians was especially applied in the Greco-Roman world to patrons, sponsors of clients and religious associations. If that sense is in view here, these would be the Christians who opened their homes for the churches to meet in them and sponsored them, providing what financial and political help they could (the Thessalonian patrons probably included Jason — Ac 17:5-9).

5:17. Even the strictest pietists of Judaism did not pray all day; but they prayed regularly, much and faithfully. "Pray without ceasing" could mean this type of prayer.

5:19-20. The term translated "quench" was often used with fire, which appropriately fits one Old Testament image of prophets unable to repress God's inspiration (Je 20:9).

5:21-22. In the context, "test everything" (NIV) may mean test prophetic utterances (5:19-20), retaining the good but rejecting the bad. *Perhaps* because some Greek religious cults practiced ecstatic inspiration, Paul warns the Thessalonians not to confuse their inspiration with that of paganism.

5:23-25. Although Paul emphasizes the *whole* person here by listing component parts in good Jewish fashion (cf., e.g., Dt 6:5; Lk 10:27), he uses the language of his culture to describe the parts (which he can divide differently elsewhere, e.g., 1Co 7:34; 14:14-15). He is quite unlike the philosophers who constructed detailed analyses, dividing the soul into two (Cicero), three (Plato, Philo) or eight (Stoics) components. Like most Jewish writers and the Old Testament, Paul saw people as a whole, with body and soul separated at death, and distinguished various components only to make his point.

Questions

Consider the day/night analogy developed here. What is characteristic of someone operating in the dark? What is characteristic of someone living in the light? (see also Ephesians 5:8-20)

What else characterises a person who is anticipating Jesus' return? Titus 2:11-13, Heb 9:28, 1 Pet 1:13, 4:7, 2 Pet 3:11-12

How much do you think about Christ's return? What affect does it have on you?

In 5:12-22 Paul is painting a picture of Church functioning well. What do you notice?

Of the various instructions mentioned in this chapter, which ones are most relevant to your small group?

Which ones do you feel you are practicing fairly well? Which one will you work on this week? Why? How?

Creative stuff

Use this space (reverse side for more space) to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

Extension exercises for Mentors and Leaders

What did Paul and his friends **do** for the Thessalonians?

What **goals and desires** did they have for the Thessalonians?

What **emotions** did they experience as they helped the Thessalonians?

What **content** did they communicate?

What do you learn about their **approach** – manner, principles and methods?

From this study, in what ways is God encouraging and challenging you as you seek to help the people he has placed on your heart?

Something to ponder

Chapter five, verse fourteen is a great passage on how to help others grow. The principle is to tailor the approach to suit where the person is at:

- Lazy– knows what to do, but doesn't want to do it (Warn)
- Timid– knows what to do, but doesn't think they can do it, when they really can! (Encourage)
- Weak– knows what to do, but can't do it without help. (help)

In our society it seems easy to encourage and help, but harder to warn or confront or challenge, yet Paul does quite a bit of this (even more so in some of his other letters).

How would you go about challenging someone who is clearly able to change things that need to be changed?

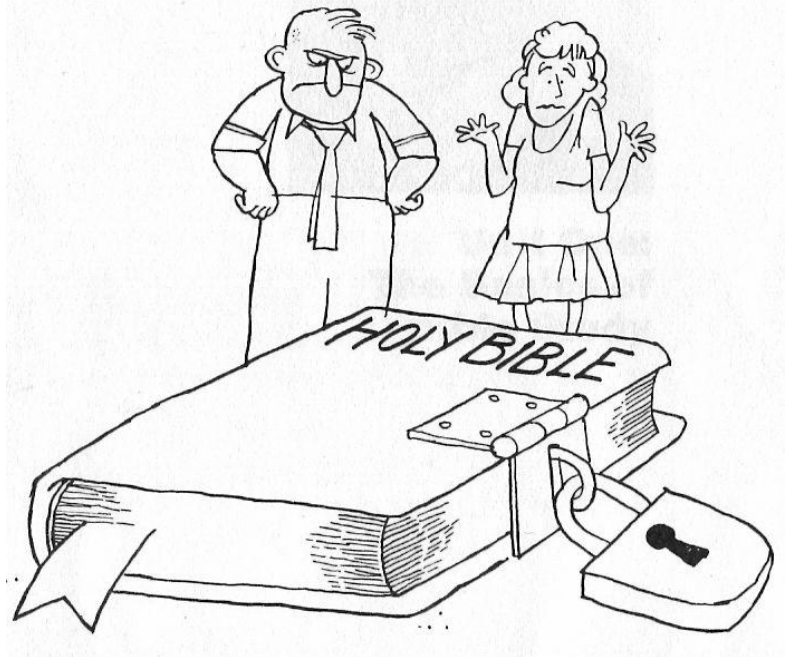
1 THESSALONIANS

Review

Appendix A – General Approach to Bible Study

Getting into the story

Many people can't get into the bible because they have the wrong approach. They think the bible is full of "do's and don'ts". But the bible is not an *instruction manual*. It is a *story book* - full of amazing accounts of people discovering just how real God was in everyday life. The first letter to the Thessalonians is a window into one of the small stories that go to make up God's big story of the human race. It is a real letter, written by an amazing man and two of his friends. It is all high drama. The three men were run out of town leaving behind a bunch of brand-new believers. A few months later, Timothy who was one of the three men, makes his way back to Thessalonica carrying this letter from the three of them. Written about AD 51, this is possibly the earliest book in the New Testament. It gives a fascinating picture of the early days of Christianity as the gospel began to spread throughout the Roman Empire.



The reason God gave us the bible in story form is that he wants it to be gutsy and real. He wants us to be inspired. He wants us to be involved in the big story of the human race, which just now happens to be our story. The Thessalonians had their day 2000 years ago. Now, it's our turn. Letters like 1st Thessalonians show us how to go about following God; they stir our hearts. As we immerse ourselves in the Thessalonians' story, and in Paul's story, the Holy Spirit excites us about following Jesus in our town or city in 2009!

The fact that the bible is essentially *story* requires a different approach. We can't afford to be superficial. We have to move beyond seizing upon a few random words and phrases here and there, lazily making them mean what we want them to mean. If we really want God to inspire us, we need to think deeply about what it was really like for those people back then. We need to honour God's intentions in giving us a letter about real people in real situations. It is all about taking their example seriously. It is life impacting life. Paul is very clear on this - "You know *how we lived* among you for your sake. You became *imitators* of us and of the Lord ... and so you became a *model* to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." 1:6-7.



So, our approach is to read the letter as if we have never seen it before, immerse ourselves in the story it tells us, and see what the Holy Spirit reveals. This will be very exciting, because, not only has the Holy Spirit inspired the letter to the Thessalonians (2 Tim 3:16-17), He is here with us now to help us understand and apply it. (1 Cor 2:12).

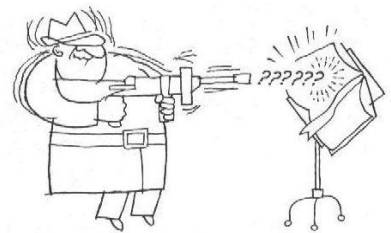
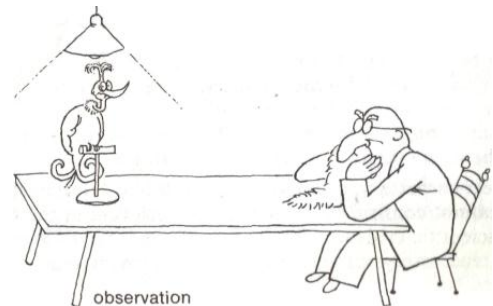
Convictions - not Opinions.

An opinion is something you hold. A conviction is something that holds you. The only way to get solid convictions is by doing your own thinking. So, our method is built around doing our own thinking. This study is not prescribed, with predetermined outcomes; this is open, original study. You get to figure things out yourself, together with your group and the help of the Holy Spirit. Very exciting!

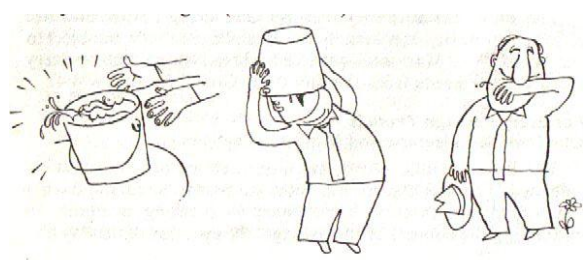
To do this, there are three things we need to become good at:

Observing, Interpreting and Responding

1. **Observing** – reading a passage for the first time, it is easy to focus in on what we don't understand, what puzzles us, or what interests us. But this causes us to narrow in on a few things; it limits our ability to take in *all* that is being said. Observation asks the question, ***What is being said?*** It is the art of noticing and appreciating as much as possible in the passage, even the obvious things. It is amazing how much more we will see in a passage if we just take a little time.
2. **Interpreting** – once we have a good grasp of what is actually there, we can focus on what it means. Interpretation asks the question, ***What does this mean?*** Or, more particularly ***What did this mean when it was written 2000 years ago?*** One danger is that we move too quickly to ***What does this mean to me?*** (That comes later, in the "Responding" step). Here, in particular, we are trying to come to grips with things we don't understand. Interpretation involves *stating our questions*, gathering *information* and drawing *conclusions*.
3. **Responding** - here the questions are, ***what does this mean to me?*** ***What does this mean to us?*** Here, we track the things that the Holy Spirit is stirring in us. This is the really exciting part because God is in the process of transforming us, making us more and more like Jesus in how we think, feel and act (2 Corinthians 3:18). In this step, we need to identify where ***we are*** at present and where we believe God ***wants us to be***.



For each study we will introduce some practical hints on how to go about this approach. You will find a full list of these see Appendix B - Study Methods



Good tangents!

Tangents are powerful. There is nothing like a good tangent to spark up a discussion. And, nothing quite as discouraging as a tangent that gets us completely sidetracked. Have you ever wondered why some tangents are incredibly helpful, while others are incredibly frustrating? In our groups, I suggest we have a good tangent when it *connects* what we are experiencing, observing or thinking *with the passage we are discussing*. It is good when the passage stimulates the tangent, when the amazing things we have been reading get us thinking about things important to us personally. Tangents like this have a crucial role in keeping things real. They prevent the discussion from becoming dry and theoretical.

We can also have bad tangents. When someone introduces an idea that is not very well connected to the passage-based discussion, bad tangents occur. The idea seems snatched “out of the air”. It is even worse if it is not that important, or of a personal nature or if it has minimal relevance to the majority of the group.

Tangents have a crucial role in making powerful connections between the biblical story and our own stories. Ideally, discussion should begin with us talking about Paul and the Thessalonians and what their lives were like, and end up with us talking about you and me and what our lives are like – and praying for one another.

Getting stuck

There will be times when we just can't seem to work out what the passage is saying. We read words and phrases we don't understand. We encounter an unfamiliar context and culture. Maybe someone comes up with a dodgy explanation and we begin to wonder how certain we can be. It is in moments like these that we could use a little bit of help, and fortunately, there is a lot of really good help available. In fact, there are some incredibly good **free bible resources** for bible study*.

Online Sources:

www.biblegateway.com

Brilliant for **word searches**, and for comparing **different translations**. Excellent IVP New Testament **Commentary**

www.nextbible.org

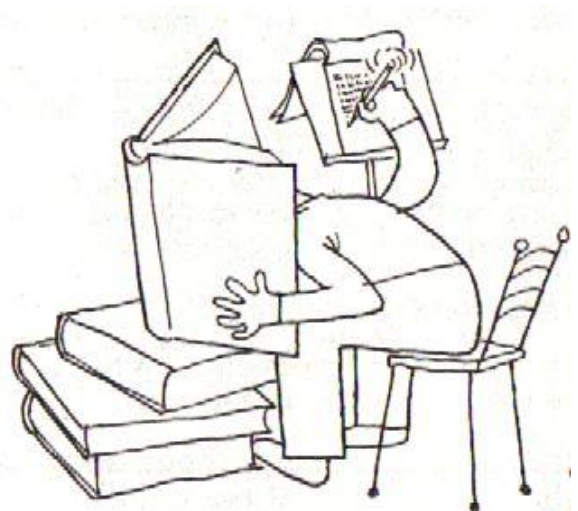
Excellent for **cross-references**, **word searches** and **word meanings**. Also a portal to a huge number of resources – translators notes, multiple translations, background info, articles, commentaries, maps (even Google satellite!), You name it, it is there.

www.en.wikipedia.org for basic info and links

E-Sword

This has to be the friendliest, most well resourced free bible software program around.

E-Sword has all the basic essentials: Multiple translations, Dictionaries, Commentaries, Cross-references, search facilities. Well worth downloading from www.e-sword.com



P.T.O

Hard Copy

Bible Notes – intros, footnotes. (NIV study bible notes are excellent).

Cross-reference columns

Concordances at back of many bibles

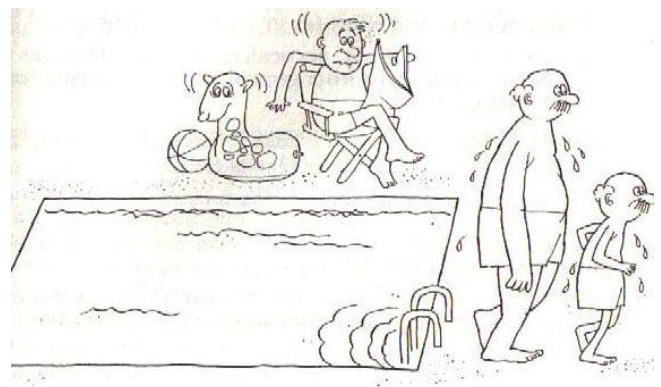
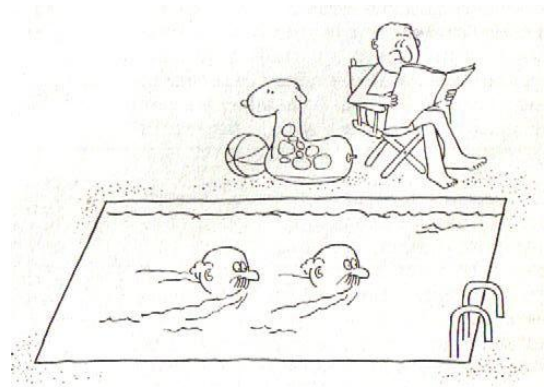
* These are best to use to in conjunction with your own study and not instead of it.

We suggest you do most of your own work first, writing in the space around the passage on the left-hand page of each study and then supplementing it with information and insights from the resources above.

Appendix B - Study Method Ideas

Observations

- Ask the “**Detective**” Questions - Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Take note of the **emotional tone** of the chapter. What do you think Paul was feeling as he wrote these words? Underline words and phrases that seem to express strong emotion and identify the emotions involved.
- Read the passage from **different perspectives**. Read it from Paul’s perspective. Read it from the Thessalonians’ perspective. You could even read it as a complete stranger who found the letter on the street. What do you notice?
- Note **comparisons** and **contrasts**
- Gather all the info you can about **people** and **places** mentioned
- Note all **repeated** words, phrases or ideas. List the **themes** of the passage
- Underline all the **nouns** in the passage. What **topics** are developed?
- List/underline all the **instructions** given.
- Underline all the **verbs** in the passage. Note the **action** in the passage.
- **Draw lines** between related parts of the passage. You could circle or colour code them
- List any **examples**, **illustrations** or **analogies**
- Note any **linking** words that reveal the **logic/structure** of the chapter – if, but, because, therefore, then, so, also, etc.



Interpretation

- **Define** important words. Use a dictionary, bible dictionary or concordance to come up with a definition.
- Come up with **questions**. For each question, find at least one **cross-reference**. Find cross-references by recalling similar passages you have read before. Check your Bible’s cross-reference column and footnotes. Look up key words in the concordance at the back of your Bible or at www.Biblegateway.com, or www.bible.org, or use a bible software program like E-Sword. You may also find some good cross-references by skim reading the rest of the book.
- Find key passages that give important **background** information. It might be good to compare this book of the bible with other passages or books that address similar themes. What differences do you notice? How might the circumstances have been different?
- Find **background information** to culture and times from the bible itself or external sources. Use www.Biblegateway.com, or www.bible.org E-Sword or IVP Background Commentary
- Draw a **diagram**, **picture** or **illustration** that conveys the meaning of the passage
- **Summarize** the main thrust of the passage in one short paragraph. It may help to first write a single sentence capturing the content of each paragraph in the chapter



- Develop an **Outline** for the passage. Break it into sections with a title for each section. Write sub points under each section title. Give the chapter an overall title. Try to keep the titles and sub points as succinct as possible. Outlining helps you identify the main ideas and see how they are connected.

Your Response

- **Write out phrases**, sentences or verses that seem particularly meaningful. Write down any feelings, memories, relationships, issues or situations that come to mind.
- Ask these **questions**: Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? An error to avoid? An example to follow? A principle to apply?
- Select a sentence that seems to be speaking to you. Read it slowly several times, each time **emphasising a different word**. Note down your thoughts.
- **Memorise** a verse that particularly speaks to you.
- Select a sentence that brings to mind a person or a situation. Use the sentence to **pray for that person** or situation.
- **Pray** your way through the passage. Read a sentence or two then stop and pray about whatever comes to mind. Invite the Holy Spirit to direct your heart and mind as you pray
- What does this passage say about **God's** character, purposes and relationship with people?
- What does this passage say about my **relationship with God**?
- What does this passage say about my **inner life** – my character, heart, behaviour, attitudes, my identity, my priorities and purpose?
- What does this say about my **relationships with other people**, my friends, faith community, family, 'neighbours'?
- What does this say about my **outer world** – my work, my studies, health, money, possessions? What does it say about the world I live in – the govt, environment, justice, arts...?

