

**Bible Study Questions
for Individuals and
Small Groups**

1 Thessalonians
Holiness and Hope
in a Hostile World

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1 Thessalonians

Holiness and Hope in a Hostile World

Bible Study Questions for Individuals and Small Groups

Is it possible for the Christian faith to survive and thrive in a world that's indifferent at best and hostile at worst? What does such a faith look like – at home, at work, and in other places where Christ's people find themselves? And what kind of church does it take to sustain that vision?

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians helps us with questions like these. It's likely the first letter Paul wrote to a church, and so it provides one of the earliest windows we have on the early Christian movement. It also brims over with Paul's affection for the young converts, and his delight that they are 'standing firm in the Lord' (3:8). He writes to strengthen their faith in Jesus and reaffirm the instruction he had passed on to them. Socialised in a pagan cultural environment, Paul helps them to learn the very different way of life that flows from leaving idols 'to serve the living and true God' (1:10) – where holiness is not withdrawal from the world but involvement in it in a new way, marked by faith, love, and hope.

Punching well above its weight, 1 Thessalonians gives us: a model to follow, in Paul's own commitment and service to the people of God; a vision for the church, in the call to live distinctively in everyday life; and a reaffirmation of our faith, in the foundational truths of the gospel of Christ crucified, risen, and coming again.

An excellent 7-minute animated overview of 1 Thessalonians has been produced by The Bible Project, and is well worth watching. Find the video (along with many others) at jointhebibleproject.com or click the play button to watch on YouTube.

[youtube.com/watch?v=No7Nq6IX23c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=No7Nq6IX23c)



The following Bible studies are designed to cover 1 Thessalonians in six sessions:

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| 1. 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 | Christian Mission: Passing it On |
| 2. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 | Christian Imitation: Pleasing to God |
| 3. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 | Christian Friendship: Longing to Share |
| 4. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 | Christian Holiness: Living it Out |
| 5. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 | Christian Hope: Waiting with Confidence |
| 6. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 | Christian Community: Walking with Others |
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You could work through each session on your own, or with someone else, or in a small group. Each group has its own way of doing things, but the following is a suggested procedure to follow:

- Pray at the start.
- Read the 'First Thoughts' section which seeks to provide a way of getting into the theme of the study.
- Read the passage from 1 Thessalonians.
- Work through the questions. Each study includes questions in different areas – on the main theme of the session, on what the Bible passage says and means (designed to help groups explore the passage more fully), for going deeper (depending on available time, some groups may choose to leave these for group members to do on their own afterwards), and for living out the passage (helping each other discover the implications of the passage for living and growing as followers of Jesus). Please note that some questions, particularly in the 'Living it Out' sections, don't have 'right' or 'wrong' answers. If you're in a group, it's important and helpful to hear insights from others. Depending on time available or the nature of the group, Bible study group leaders may want to pick out the most pertinent questions for their group to discuss.

Further information on the background to the letter is available in the LICC preaching pack on 1 Thessalonians.

- Each study includes some pointers for prayer at the end of the session.
- Each study also includes a vignette, a short story of someone whose faith in Jesus has made a difference to them. Some of them include a link to a video which could be shown to the group. You may decide to use all the films or none of them. They could work well either as a way to introduce the themes you will explore in the session, or to round off a discussion, to show ways that people have met with God in different circumstances. Use the stories to encourage each other, to fire your imagination for how God might work through you, and as a prompt to tell your own stories.

If your church's preaching programme is covering 1 Thessalonians, working through the questions in these sessions provides an ideal opportunity for teaching from the letter to be reinforced, and for the frontline implications of the passages to be explored further in discussion with others. To borrow a line from Paul, 'encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing' (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

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1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 Christian Mission: Passing it On

First Thoughts

It's all too easy to be cynical about the possibility of people changing. 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks', we sometimes say. And yet, at the heart of the Christian faith is the claim that people can be changed, that people can be born again, that people can cross over from death to life, that people can be transplanted from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, that people who were lost can be found, that people who were dead in Adam can become new creations in Christ. The Bible expresses in many different ways the radical change that God brings about as part of his overarching mission to bring salvation to all nations. As transformed people, we are called to be a part of that, just like the Thessalonians.

Read – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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 kind of reception you gave us. 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.

Focus on the Theme

1. Think back to how you became a Christian. Was it a long or short process? Who was involved? What different ways did God use to get your attention with the message of the gospel?

What Does the Bible Say?

2. What do we learn about the church in 1:1?

3. How is the faith, love, and hope of the Thessalonians expressed (1:3)?

4. What was involved in the Thessalonians becoming Christians (1:4-8)? What did God do? What did Paul and his companions do? What did the Thessalonians do?

5. In 1:9-10, what three verbs describe what the Thessalonians did when they embraced Christ? How far do these words provide a handy summary of what happens to all of us when we become Christians?

Going Deeper

6. Faith, love, and hope are mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 5:8, and appear elsewhere in other letters (Romans 5:1-5; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5-6; Ephesians 1:15-18; Colossians 1:3-6; 1 Peter 1:21-22). In what ways does this triad capture the essence of the Christian life?

7. Paul describes how the 'gospel' came to them (1:5), but what are the main elements of the gospel message? Look at: Mark 1:1, 14-15; Romans 1:1-4, 16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:8-9.

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1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 Christian Mission: Passing it On

Living it Out

8. What examples can you share from your own experience, or the experience of someone you know, where faith, love, and hope (1:3) made a practical difference in the everyday spheres of work, home, and elsewhere?
9. The Thessalonians imitated Paul, Silas, and Timothy, as well as Jesus, and in turn became models for others to imitate (1:6-7). What good models do you seek to imitate in your everyday life, and how far are you aware of providing a model for others?
10. According to 1:9-10, turning, serving, and waiting are prominent features of Christian conversion. What might these dimensions look like in our own lives?

Prayer Time

Thanksgiving – for God saving you and being at work in your lives. Drawing on 1:2-3 as a template, thank God for one another's 'work produced by faith... labour prompted by love, and... endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Pray – for your own witness and testimony on your everyday frontlines to be like that of the Thessalonians. Flowing out of 1:4-10, what sort of reputation would you like to have as a church and as individual Christians? Perhaps take a moment to share or write down these desires as a basis for prayer.

Praise – that God will make good on his mission to bless all nations, and for the part he calls us to play in this plan.

Manoj

In 2008 the mortgage market collapsed and Manoj's world started to crumble. Before he became a follower of Jesus, his life was 'consumed by the love of money'. As a property trader, his whole world revolved around making as much as he could.

For Manoj, the credit crunch was like being in an earthquake. Everything fell apart. On top of which, during the same period, his son became seriously ill. But Manoj knew that an American couple he and his wife had recently befriended were praying for them and their son. And Manoj felt there was something they had that was different. They told Manoj that their church was praying too.

So, when his son recovered more quickly than expected, Manoj and his wife went to the church. 'I literally walked out a different person,' says Manoj. 'My wife really didn't recognise me. My mother

thought I'd joined some kind of cult because suddenly I wanted to try and do everything differently, particularly in the area of business.' Manoj knew himself as someone who had been arrogant, ruthless, and money driven, but came to see that there's a God who forgives and wipes the slate clean. 'How', says Manoj, 'do you get your head round that?'

Watch Manoj tell his story here



greatcommission.co.uk/manojs-story

First Thoughts

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Or so we're told. But not all imitation is flattering – as parents discover when children speak or act in a way that reflects their own worst traits! For good or ill, imitation is basic to life, ingrained into our relationships with those closest to us and most influential on us. From birth onwards, what we believe and how we live is shaped by what we see and hear around us. The question is not whether we will imitate, but who or what we will imitate. For Paul, the engine that drives imitation in Christian discipleship is the gospel of the crucified king. Having already noted that the Thessalonians 'became imitators of us and of the Lord' (1:6), Paul now shows us how the message of Christ worked out in him and his companions, in contrast with others who lived a very different way. In tracing out this pattern, Paul calls the Thessalonians and us 'to live lives worthy of God' (2:12).

Read – 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

1 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. **2** We 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. **3** For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. **4** On 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. **5** You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. **6** We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. **7** Instead, we were like young children among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, **8** so 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. **9** Surely 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. **10** You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.

11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, **12** encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

13 And 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.

14 For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: you suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews **15** who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone **16** 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.

Focus on the Theme

1. What responsibilities do you carry in life – at home, at work, or elsewhere? What temptations do you face in the way you approach these responsibilities? Who has influenced you the most in the way you go about life in these areas?

What Does the Bible Say?

2. How has being 'entrusted with the gospel' (2:4) shaped the ministry of Paul and his companions (2:3-6)?

3. Paul compares their way of life among the Thessalonians to a 'young child' (2:7), a 'mother' (2:7), and a 'father' (2:11). How do these family metaphors inform our understanding of and approach to Christian discipleship?

4. Why do you suppose Paul goes to such lengths to describe their conduct among the Thessalonians? What affect might such a description have on the Thessalonians?

5. Harsh though the words in 2:14-16 seem, how would they have encouraged the Christians in Thessalonica?

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Christian Imitation: Pleasing to God

Going Deeper

6. Read some passages in 2 Corinthians where Paul writes about the nature of his work on behalf of the church (1:12; 4:1-2; 6:3-13; 10:7-11). How do these passages compare with what he says in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12?

7. Read and reflect on Philippians 2:5-11, noting from the immediate context (2:1-4 and 12-18) how those who are 'in Christ' are shaped by the story of Christ.

Living it Out

8. Even though we are not apostles, to what extent does this passage challenge us to live as followers of a different way of life on our own frontlines, such as at work or in college?

9. In what ways have you found evangelism to be difficult? What ideas and encouragement from this passage can help you to address these difficulties?

10. How likely is it that we might suffer persecution for being Christians (2:2, 14-15)? Discuss your current situations – on your frontline, in the local community, nationally – and how far Christianity is understood as welcome or as a threat in society.

Prayer Time

Give thanks for those who took an interest in your spiritual welfare when you were a young Christian, who nurtured you.

Share in twos or threes how this passage speaks to you and shapes you as disciples of Jesus, and pray that God will enable you to work out these things in your everyday life.

Pray for those being persecuted because of their Christian faith in different parts of the world today.

John

John is 28 years old. He works as a door man and bouncer – so mostly works at night time. His working day is often about dealing with difficult situations and conflict. He lives in Woolwich Arsenal, and was commissioned as an ambassador recently at St Paul's Shadwell.

John says 'For me, being commissioned as an Ambassador was about asking Jesus to enable me to be an ambassador for him. I became a Christian less than 2 years ago, so it was like reaffirming my first prayer, but this time more focussed on what Jesus wants me to do in my life.'

In the challenging world of work as a bouncer and doorman, John finds prayer is key. 'I try my hardest and constantly pray "Lord, give me

patience" and the Lord really answers my prayer so I've been able to do my job over the last year.'

John continues 'It makes a real difference being a Christian, before I might have struggled with the job, but now I am aware that I am flawed as are the people around me. Being a Christian helps me to take into account other people's feelings and situations – I don't know what they are dealing with at home, the stresses they are under – so I don't want to make things worse, I want to be sensitive to them.'

Ambassadors 2020 is part of Capital Vision 2020, the Diocese of London's shared vision for a Church for London that is Christ-centred and outward looking.

John's story, along with the stories of other 'ambassadors' can be found here:
ambassadors2020.org/stories

First Thoughts

It's not too difficult to accumulate hundreds of 'friends' on Facebook, even though studies suggest that we have never felt more lonely as a society. But friendship takes us to the heart of the biblical story – in a God who not only restores us to himself, but places us in relationship with others in the body of Christ. Deep friendships are formed over time through sharing life together, its highs and its lows. It's that sort of commitment that allows us to be strong – together – in the face of struggles and opposition, and to make a difference in the places to which God has called us. Paul's language in this passage is the sort that was used between friends expressing their feelings for each other and their commitment to each other. It allows us to plot something of what Christian friendship looks like, and what might be involved in a community that takes seriously the call to be devoted to one another.

Read – 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

17 But, 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. **18** For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, did, again and again – but Satan blocked our way. **19** For 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? **20** Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

1 So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. **2** We 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, **3** so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. **4** In 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. **5** For 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.

6 But 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. **7** Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. **8** For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. **9** How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? **10** Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

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

Focus on the Theme

1. Think about your friendships with others past and present. What is it that has made them work well? What are the qualities that make for good friendships?

What Does the Bible Say?

2. What evidence do we find in this passage about the strength of Paul's love for the Thessalonians (2:17-18, 20; 3:2, 5, 10)?

3. What does this passage reveal about the way Satan works (2:18; 3:5)?

4. To what extent does Paul seem to view suffering as part of normal Christian experience (3:3-4, and see 1:6 and 2:14)? To what extent do we share his perspective?

5. What are Paul's priorities for the Thessalonians as expressed in his prayer for them (3:11-13)?

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1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

Christian Friendship: Longing to Share

Going Deeper

6. How do Matthew 5:11-12, Acts 5:41-42, and 1 Peter 2:19-24 add to what Paul says about persecution in 1 Thessalonians?
7. As time allows, take a look at some other prayers of Paul (e.g., Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). How do they compare with what Paul prays for in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13?

Living it Out

8. How does this passage help us get a proper perspective on the opposition we might face as Christians and how we respond to it?
9. In what ways could the example of Paul's depth of love and concern for the Thessalonians shape the relationships we have with each other?
10. What practical ideas emerge from this passage that can help you become even better at expressing love and committed friendship within your church or small group?

Prayer Time

Split into twos or threes in the group. Pray for each other using the words and ideas of 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. Commit to praying for the other person or people throughout the next week.

Amanda

Amanda describes her primary calling, after following Jesus, as caring for her husband and her children. She often finds herself defending this full-time caring role as something of great value, as it can be misunderstood or rejected by others, but her own confidence in who she is in Christ brings her a great sense of freedom. Amanda uses this freedom to be available to be used by God. She's been able to meet people outside the normal 'working hours' culture, and has had the time to give them when they've been in need. Amanda is prayerful, asking God to show her how to make her availability count. She prays, 'Lord, show me how I can be a blessing to those I encounter today', and can describe any number of times she's met people and felt prompted to encourage, bless, affirm, or help them in

some particular way. She is responsive to the needs of people around her – chatting with parents at the school gates, meeting friends in a local café, and with people who have started coming to church through her invitation.

Watch Amanda tell her story here



licc.org.uk/resources/amandas-story/

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 Christian Holiness: Living it Out

First Thoughts

Societies throughout the world live according to some 'code'. At a basic level, we acknowledge it every time we drive a car and stop at red traffic lights, go on green, and travel the correct way around a roundabout. We're aware when the 'code' gets broken, by ourselves or by others. Even in today's so-called 'secular' society, where men and women have supposedly shaken off the shackles of religion, people still get upset when someone steals their money, spouse, or parking space. Most people live according to some code, which provides a framework for their life, decisions, and relationships. For Christians, being a follower of Jesus involves much more than changing a few features of our lifestyle here and there. It requires a complete reordering of the whole of our existence in loving service to Christ himself, whose call embraces every area of our lives and every relationship with others.

Read – 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

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. **2** For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; **4** that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, **5** not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; **6** and 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. **7** For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. **8** Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

9 Now 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. **10** And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, **11** and 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, **12** so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Focus on the Theme

1. What is one area where you are aware that being a Christian has made a significant difference to your life?

What Does the Bible Say?

2. How does Paul's prayer that their love would increase and that the Lord would enable them to be blameless and holy (3:12-13) prepare us for the concerns of this passage?

3. The words 'live' (4:1) and 'daily life' (4:12) translate the word 'walk'. What is it about 'walking' that makes it such a good metaphor for the everyday living of the Christian life?

4. In sexual matters, what are some of the ways we might 'wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister' (4:6)?

5. How does the call to love one another (4:9-10) relate to what comes before (4:3-8) and what comes after (4:11-12)?

Going Deeper

6. According to what Paul says throughout 4:3-8, what is the motivation for avoiding sexual immorality? How do these reasons compare with the grounds Paul lays out in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20?

7. How does Paul fill out what he says about work in this passage (4:11-12) in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15?

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 Christian Holiness: Living it Out

Living it Out

8. Like the Thessalonians, we live in an age of different views about sex and sexual morality. What does sexual holiness look like in today's world?
9. What might loving your brothers and sisters in Christ (4:9-10) look like in practice?
10. To what extent are the instructions in 4:11-12 significant for Christians in workplaces today?

Prayer Time

As a group, confess any failings to God in these areas, and ask for grace for ongoing struggles.

Perhaps share in twos or threes situations where you are seeking to win the respect of people who don't know Jesus – at work, at home, in the neighbourhood, at college – and pray for God to enable you to live as those who love God and others.

Give thanks for the amazing privilege of knowing how to please God (4:1), and for his gift of the Holy Spirit to enable us to live holy lives (4:8).

Gemma

On the very first night of her first week at university, Gemma told people that she was a Christian. As it happens, she says, 'they really respected me for the choices I was making even though they went against what a lot of people at university would be doing and were doing... and it led to lots of conversations throughout my entire degree'. Gemma's had experience of people being rude about her faith in Jesus, of being knocked back, and experience of friends coming to faith and being baptised. Church and small groups are valuable, says Gemma, and we need them, but 'that's not why we're here'. We need to take the step of faith of telling someone about Jesus, she says, 'even when it seems absolutely

terrifying'. Some people will dismiss it and some won't be bothered, but there will be others 'who are just waiting for one person to approach them and just one person to spark their interest in it. If we don't go out and reach them, then no one will.'

Watch Gemma tell her story here



greatcommission.co.uk/gemmas-story

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 Christian Hope: Waiting with Confidence

First Thoughts

'I hope to get a pay-rise this year.' 'I hope it doesn't rain much next week.' 'I hope Preston North End win the FA Cup this season.' Unlike those wishes – which may or may not happen – hope in the Bible is always sure. Christians might disagree on the finer details about what will happen in the future, but we share a conviction that God's good plan for all things will come to pass: Jesus will return, evil and suffering will be done away with, we will be given resurrected bodies, and will live in a new heaven and earth. In the meantime, this amazing hope allows us to endure and be resilient in the face of difficulties, and brings confidence and joy as we live in anticipation of that great day.

Read – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

13 Brothers 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 of mankind, who have no hope. **14** For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. **15** According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For 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. **17** After 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 for ever. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, **2** for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, 'Peace and safety', destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. **5** You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. **6** So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. **8** But 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. **9** For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. **10** He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Focus on the Theme

1. What do your non-Christian friends and colleagues look forward to? How might they express their long-term hope for the world?

What Does the Bible Say?

2. What do 4:13-14 and 5:9-10 tell us about the content of Christian hope? On what is it based?

3. In some circles, it's become popular to believe that Christians will be secretly raptured from the earth some years before Jesus returns. How does what Paul says in 4:15-17 differ from that perspective?

4. What are the two metaphors that Paul uses for the timing of Christ's coming (5:3-4)? What does each metaphor communicate about the timing of his return?

5. What dangers are associated with living in darkness (5:5-7)? What instructions does Paul give for living in the light (5:8)?

5

1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11 Christian Hope: Waiting with Confidence

Going Deeper

6. As time allows, glance at a few other passages related to our future hope: Matthew 24:29-44; Romans 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 2 Peter 3:3-16. How do they reinforce and supplement what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11?

7. What does 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 add to Paul's teaching on future hope?

Living it Out

8. How, really – on a day-today basis – does hope affect your convictions and conduct as a Christian? How, according to this passage, should the promise of Jesus' return shape our lives?

9. What difference might the hope of Christ's return make to how we think about: (a) material possessions, and (b) personal suffering?

10. Of all the different places where you spend time – home, family, work, leisure activity, church – where do you feel the need to enjoy a greater sense of hope? Why is that the case?

Prayer Time

In the light of our future hope as Christians:

- praise God for the certainty of Christ's return, the resurrection of the dead, and final salvation.
- pray for comfort for the bereaved, and strength for individuals you know, and for Christians around the world who are suffering or struggling in various ways.
- pray that how we live our everyday lives now as those who 'belong to the day' (5:8) will point others to Jesus.

Jeremy

Four years ago, Jeremy found a lump on his ribs. He went to hospital and was told he had a rare type of cancer. After surgery and chemotherapy, everything seemed fine; but following the discovery of another lump, he was given 18 months to live. It's been a difficult time for Jeremy. Yet, as he says, 'my experience has been that God gives you the grace to face certain circumstances'. He also notes that 'when you're in bad shape, people will listen to you', and so it's been 'an unbelievable opportunity to witness – after all, you can't argue with a dying person!'

According to Jeremy, as a Christian, 'death is a tough but also a hopeful thing. For the atheist, there is no hope in death at all. But we have the message that offers hope in death. We have the cure to the ultimate cancer that's infected the whole human race – sin. Yes, the truth is, we have the answer to death.'

Read more of Jeremy's story here:
[greatcommission.co.uk/
later-than-you-think](http://greatcommission.co.uk/later-than-you-think)

First Thoughts

'I love humanity; it's people I can't stand.' So says Linus in one of Charles M. Schultz's Peanuts comic strips. Many Christians have their variation of that sentiment which goes along the lines of getting along fine with Jesus but struggling with the church. Wouldn't we be better off just loving Jesus and not worrying about church? In fact, however, being a Christian is bound up with belonging to the church. The gospel which saves us as believers in Christ is also the gospel which incorporates us into the body of Christ. As individual followers of Jesus, we're brought into the family of God (five times in this passage Paul calls us 'brothers and sisters'), with a set of responsibilities in how we relate to each other and what we do when we meet together.

Read – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

12 Now 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. **13** Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. **14** And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. **15** Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

16 Rejoice always, **17** pray continually, **18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

19 Do not quench the Spirit. **20** Do not treat prophecies with contempt **21** but test them all; hold on to what is good, **22** reject every kind of evil.

23 May 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. **24** The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

25 Brothers and sisters, pray for us. **26** Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. **27** I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Focus on the Theme

1. How have you been encouraged and equipped through belonging to the family of God, the church?

What Does the Bible Say?

2. The phrase 'brothers and sisters' occurs five times in this passage – 5:12, 14, 25, 26 [the NIV translates with 'God's people'], 27. How does this 'family' metaphor provide a helpful foundation for Paul's exhortations in this final section of the letter?

3. According to 5:12-15, what are: (a) the responsibilities of leaders to the congregation, (b) the responsibilities of the congregation towards leaders, and (c) the responsibilities of members of the congregation towards each other?

4. How would Paul's exhortations in 5:16-22 shape the gathered worship in a local church?

5. How does Paul's prayer in 5:23-24 compare with his prayer in 3:11-13? What main themes of the letter do the prayers bring together?

6

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Christian Community: Walking with Others

Going Deeper

6. Read and reflect on Paul's exhortations in Romans 12:9-16. How do these shape the 'outward' face of the church as we relate to colleagues at work, neighbours, and people who live in our local community?
7. Paul writes that God sanctifies us, keeps us, is faithful and will do it (5:23-24, and see Philippians 1:6). How would you respond to someone who said this looks as if we play no part in our sanctification, that we are passive receivers of God's work in our lives?

Living it Out

8. In what ways could your church show greater support and encouragement for its leaders (5:12-13)?
9. Share some reflections with each other on how prayer might become a stronger feature in the corporate life of your church.
10. Based on what Paul says in this passage, reflect on the strengths of your own local church and the areas where there is room for improvement.

Prayer Time

Spend some time praying through the exhortations in this passage, turning them into requests to God for your own church community.

As you come to the end of these studies in 1 Thessalonians, share with each other two things to thank God for, and two things to ask God for. Then pray them out.

Paul

Paul is part of a small church. Their focus in encouraging people to share Jesus is to pray for one another; as Paul puts it: 'to be actually praying for each other where we are, in the context that God is giving us'. As a church, they want 'to resource the individuals in the group to be where they are, in work, in their neighbourhoods and family, sharing Christ'. For Paul, it involves being confident that the Lord is already at work in people's lives, and being sensitive to how his Spirit is leading them to speak into what he's already doing. As Paul says, 'prayer for me is

about seeking God's heart, both in terms of how we see other people, to see them as he sees them, with compassion and with love, but also then to have the sensitivity to his leading to know how do we be his voice, and speak in, and be his instruments in their lives'.

Read more of Paul's story here:
greatcommission.co.uk/pauls-story

Further Reading on 1 Thessalonians

The following list offers some further reading on 1 Thessalonians for those who might like to dig deeper into the letter.

John Byron, *1 & 2 Thessalonians, The Story of God Bible Commentary*

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

Alec Motyer and Steve Motyer, *Discovering 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Crossway Bible Guides*

(Leicester: Crossway Books, 1999).

John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians: Preparing for the Coming King, The Bible Speaks Today*

(Leicester: IVP, 1991).

Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians, The New Testament for Everyone*

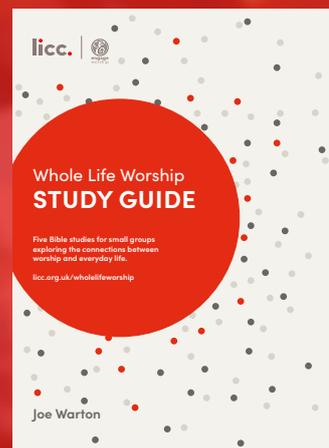
(London: SPCK, 2002).

Journeying On

We long to follow Christ in every area of our lives; to offer our whole lives as worship to God. Of course, we know that worship is more than music. It's a response to the love and grace of a faithful God and all that he has done for us. So how might this kind of worship become a reality in our Monday to Sunday lives? In our everyday places – offices and colleges, shops and banks, hospital wards and athletic clubs, cafés, nursing homes, and churches – the places where we 'do life', week by week?

LICC have developed a set of Bible studies to help you and your small group explore how worship transforms every area of our lives: our everyday work and activities, our speech, the way we see things and perhaps most importantly, our hearts. Created as part of a suite of resources for churches, Whole Life Worship – the book and the Journey Pack – these studies can also be used independently.

Each session explores a Bible passage around the session's theme and then encourages the group to discover its implications for Monday to Sunday life and worship. There's a short animated video to watch and discuss each session – available with the Journey Pack, or free from our website – licc.org.uk/wholelifeworship. Plus ideas to take away and try, and prayer suggestions for the group.



About LICC

We have a dream that every Christian would go out into their bit of God's world confident that God can work through them, confident that Jesus is good news for the people they meet, good news for the things they do, good news for the organisations they engage in.

At LICC we're dedicated to developing the biblical wisdom, the cultural insights, the stories and the practical ideas that help people live out God's living word creatively, show and share his good news confidently, and make a positive contribution to the places they live, work and play.

We offer resources for personal or small group use. Courses for people at different stages of their working lives. Training days and learning hubs for church leaders. Speakers. Events. Books. Blogs. Videos. And more to come.

We'd love to stay in touch so why not visit our website – licc.org.uk – and sign up to receive regular emails and updates, or browse to discover fresh resources for your group.