



Hold Onto Hope

— 2 THESSALONIANS —

GUIDEBOOK

Hold Onto Hope

2 THESSALONIANS

Art History Lesson 101: Vasily Kandinsky, born in Russia, 1866. He was one of the founders of the abstract art movement (nice landscape paintings were not his thing!). He's also famous for painting on both sides of the one piece of board. Sometimes the contrast between the two sides was striking. On one side, dark and ominous. On the flip side, all bright and cheerful.

The short letter known as 2 Thessalonians is sort of like a Kandinsky picture. On the one hand we will discover strange words about the future - *'For that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction'* (2:3). But then on the other hand we will also come across very plain words about everyday life in the present - *'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'* (3:10). How does this work? These two teachings come together because real hope for the future should shape our lives now.

As we explore through 2 Thessalonians, it will be helpful to keep in mind various connections with other biblical teaching, but none more so than with Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian Christians (if you would like to go back, you will find our 2025 1 Thessalonians talks online). These two letters were perhaps sent only one month apart so it will be helpful to occasionally do some cross-checking and see how both letters serve to encourage us and help us to hold onto our hope in Jesus.



BIBLE TALK NOTES

Sunday 24 May

2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-12

A series of horizontal dotted lines spanning the width of the page, intended for writing notes.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Sunday Reflections

What did you find helpful or interesting about Sunday's bible talk on 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12, or what questions did it raise?

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Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Over the course of the next few weeks we're going to break up the early part of 2 Thessalonians passage into the following sections: A. Commendation B. Comfort C. Correction and D. Constancy.

A. COMMENDATION (1:1-4)

1. Paul (along with Silus and Timothy) writes this letter not simply to say "Hi" but to help his Christian friends in the city of Thessalonica. What is the threat in 2 Thessalonians 1? If you want to get some background, check out Acts 17:1-13.

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2. After the greeting of v1, how would you say Paul starts his letter (v3-4)?

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3. What similarities and differences do you see with the way that Paul starts his first letter to them in 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3? What does this suggest to you?

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4. Why is expressing thanks such a good thing to do? Do you think of yourself as someone who does this? What would it mean to grow in such a way?

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B. COMFORT (1:5-12)

5. Verses 5-10 are all about what God will do in the future. Here we have a picture of what will happen when Jesus returns to judge the world. These might not be easy words to digest. Have a go at summarising these verses in a couple of sentences and share with the group what you come up with.

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Here is how one person has responded to the words of 2 Thessalonians 1:

"How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they have been..... Does the one who told us to love our enemies intend to wreak vengeance on his own enemies for all eternity?" Clark Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent".

6. How do you respond to this quote? Discuss.

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This can be a hard passage. But we would do well to not think of God as some crazed madman indiscriminately emptying his fury upon poor innocents. God will exercise his sovereign right to bring punishment upon his enemies who afflict his people and don't obey the gospel (or do not respond to the gospel in faith and repentance. See Romans 10:16, 1 Peter 4:17). Injustice and evil will be met with justice and His absolute goodness. God's future judgment is a theme that runs throughout the bible including in the teachings of Jesus.

7. Why do you think Paul reminds these Thessalonian Christians about the future?

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Verses 11-12 is Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian Christians. Note the first words of verse 11 – "With this in mind..." It's a prayer that acknowledges that our future hope should impact the way that we live now.

We've covered too much already to get into any detail with this prayer, but Paul is saying – *because of future judgment (both in giving relief and punishment), I pray that you may live fruitful and productive Christian lives while you await this judgment.* This takes us back to the things that Paul gave thanks for in verses 3-4. As God has brought change and growth in them already, the prayer is that God may continue to change them and fulfill their godly purposes and desires.

8. What can you do this year so that God might bring real growth in you? Just pick one area to think about. You might like to split up into smaller groups to discuss, share and pray.

Faith in God



Love for Others



Perseverance

 *Prayer*

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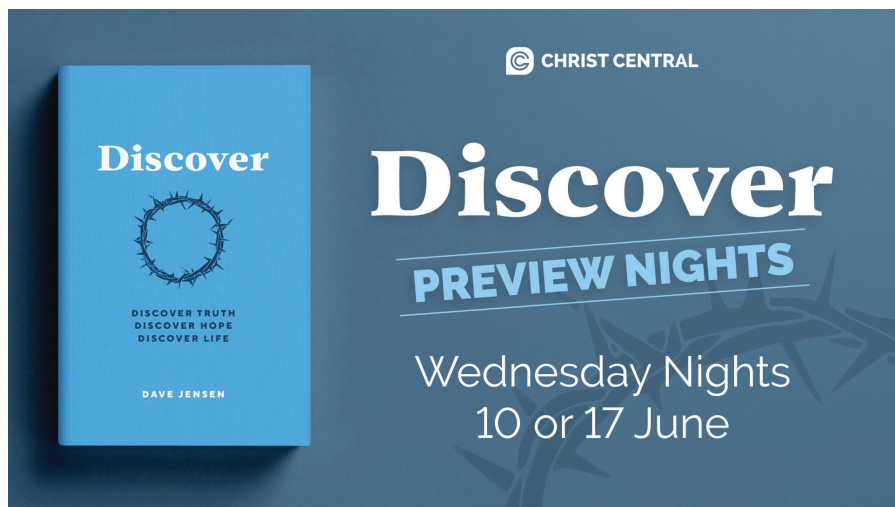
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 *For Next Week*

Working our way through the letter of 2 Thessalonians is like going on an outdoor hike where the two toughest peaks to climb are right at the start. You've climbed the first peak. The next one is 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. At home have a read of this passage to help with your preparation.

Growth Groups & Discover

Growth groups will miss one study in this 5-part 2 Thessalonians series because we would love each group to come along to one of our upcoming Discover Preview Nights. We'd love for you to get a 'taster' of what our new Discover course is like and receive your feedback. Through your involvement we want to make it the best possible experience for our friends and family who we bring in the future.



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Discover

DISCOVER TRUTH
DISCOVER HOPE
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Discover

PREVIEW NIGHTS

Wednesday Nights
10 or 17 June

The graphic features a blue background with a faint, stylized crown of thorns. On the left is a book cover for 'Discover' by Dave Jensen, which has a blue cover and a white crown of thorns logo. The text 'Discover' is in white, and the subtitle 'DISCOVER TRUTH DISCOVER HOPE DISCOVER LIFE' is in smaller white letters. The author's name 'DAVE JENSEN' is at the bottom. To the right, the word 'Discover' is written in large white letters, with 'PREVIEW NIGHTS' in blue letters below it. The dates 'Wednesday Nights 10 or 17 June' are written in white at the bottom right. The Christ Central logo is in the top right corner.



BIBLE TALK NOTES

Sunday 31 May

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

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2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

As we started on last week, we're covering the initial part of 2 Thessalonians through the framework of: A. Commendation B. Comfort C. Correction and D. Constancy. So this week we're up to Correction.

Sunday Reflections

What did you find helpful or interesting about Sunday's bible talk on 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, or what questions did it raise?

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Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

C. CORRECTION (2v1-12)

1. What is the state of affairs in the Thessalonian church according to Paul's words in v1-2?

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2. There seems to be an ongoing unsettling controversy within the Thessalonian church about the timing of Jesus' return. In his previous letter, what was the issue that Paul needed to correct (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and what's the timing/chronology issue he's referring to in this 2 Thessalonians passage?

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3. The Thessalonian Christians are confused and upset because of certain false teaching. According to v2 what have been the sources of this false teaching? What do you think can be sources of false teaching for us today?

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4. One reason that this passage is so difficult for us is that Paul explicitly relies on previous time spent with the Thessalonians and the teaching he gave them then ('don't you remember..' v5 'And now you know...' v6), and so he does not elaborate on certain assumed things. That being said, we're first introduced to a certain figure in v3, **'the man of lawlessness'**.

What is he like – his character and ambition?

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What will be his destiny?

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Why does he have power and influence?

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5. What picture are we given of our Lord Jesus in this passage?

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This passage leaves open many questions such as:

What is the temple (v4)? Possible Answers: the Jerusalem temple that was destroyed in 70AD OR the church (which is described in the New Testament as God's temple) OR an overall metaphor for describing a blasphemous evil opposed to God OR...!

What/Who is the Restrainer (v6-7)? Possible Answers: The Holy Spirit and the work of the church OR Paul and the preaching of the gospel OR Rome and the power of the state OR...!

6. The biggest question we perhaps have is – Who actually is this man of lawlessness? Do you have personal reactions to this portrait of this mysterious figure and Paul's explanation of events?

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There has been a long history of speculation in the church about this figure. Candidates have included: Syrian King Antiochus IV, Roman General Pompey, mad Roman Emperor Gaius (Caligula), Roman Emperors who demanded to be called Lord and persecuted Christians such as Nero and Domitian, the Vandal conquerors of Rome, Islamic Conquerors of Palestine in the Middle Ages, Roman Catholic Popes (and as a counter reaction to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church returned the favour by labelling Martin Luther as 'the man of sin'), and more recently, Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin. If you trawl the internet, you'll discover that current world leaders are given that label too!

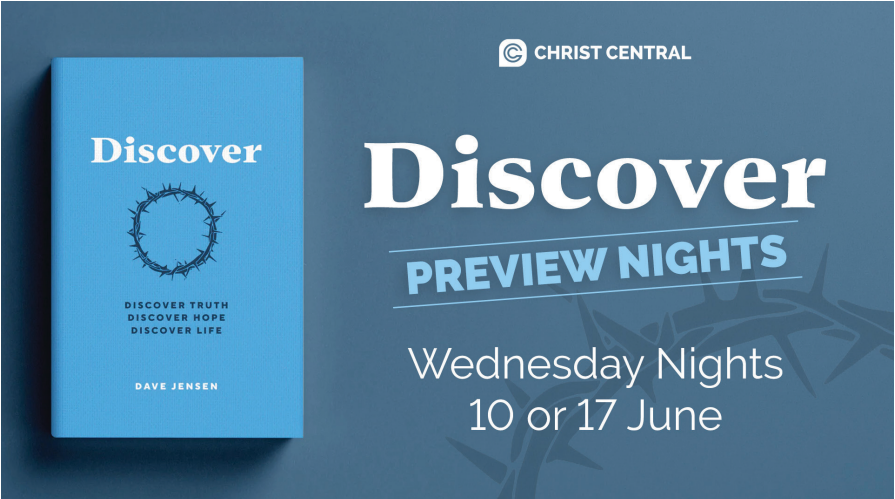
Even if we resist adding to the speculation, we should not ignore the consistent biblical picture – that from Satan's involvement in 'the Fall' of Genesis 3 onwards, there has been and will be wicked spiritual rebellion against God. There are those who arrogantly seek to place themselves in the position of God and to persecute His people. In your own time, feel free to look up passages such as: Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:1-2; Daniel 11:29-35; and Matthew 24:15-24. As we think about this 'man of lawlessness' we could also add in the biblical portrait of 'the antichrists', 'the Antichrist' and 'the spirit of the Antichrist' who is already in the world and denies that Jesus is the Christ (See 1 John 2:18; 2:22; 4:2-3).

7. While today's passage leaves us with questions, how does this teaching bring a sense of certainty and comfort to us?

Prayer

Growth Groups & Discover

Growth groups will miss one study in this 5-part 2 Thessalonians series because we would love each group to come along to one of our upcoming Discover Preview Nights. We'd love for you to get a 'taster' of what our new Discover course is like and receive your feedback. Through your involvement we want to make it the best possible experience for our friends and family who we bring in the future.



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PREVIEW NIGHTS

Wednesday Nights
10 or 17 June



BIBLE TALK NOTES

Sunday 7 June

2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-17

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2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

We've been covering the initial part of 2 Thessalonians through the framework of: A. Commendation (1:1-4), B. Comfort (1:5-12), C. Correction (2:1-12) and D. Constancy (2:13-17). This week we're up to Constancy which is perhaps an unfamiliar word, but it means firmness and stability.

Sunday Reflections

What did you find helpful or interesting about Sunday's bible talk on 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, or what questions did it raise?

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Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

D. CONSTANCY (2:13-17)

1. If you think back to the state of affairs with these Christians (2:1-2) and the reality of false teaching that had infiltrated their church, what is surprising about what Paul says next in v13-14?

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2. These verses cover some big (and beautiful!) theological concepts - God 'chooses' (v13) and God 'calls' (v14). This in fact takes us back to our recent study of Romans 8:29-30. Below is that passage along with the table we previously provided.

'For those God **foreknew** he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he **predestined**, he also **called**; those he called, he also **justified**; those he justified, he also **glorified**.' Romans 8:29-30.

Below are some definitions that largely come from John Stott's 'The Message of Romans', p248-253.

foreknew - We might think the natural meaning of foreknow, is to simply know of something in advance, and so God foresees who will believe. But biblically, foreknowledge is more like 'forelove' – it's about a personal relationship of care and affection. God sets his love on us. When God 'knows' people he watches over them. See 1 Peter 1:2.

predestined - We 'decided for Christ' freely, but it is God's decision before it can be ours. Predestination emphasises God's gracious sovereign choice. There is mystery here, but our salvation is God's favour and act. Human merit is so much excluded that we trace our salvation beyond our obedience which is evidence of our salvation, and even beyond our faith which appropriates our salvation. Ephesians 1:5-6.

called - This is the historical application of God's eternal predestination. God's call comes to people through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). When the gospel is preached to people with power and they respond with the obedience of faith, then we now God has chosen them (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5).

justified - God's effective call enables those who hear it to believe, and those who believe are justified by faith. Justification is a big theme in Romans! Justification is more than forgiveness or acquittal or even acceptance, it is that declaration that we sinners are now righteous in God's sight – Christ's righteousness has been conferred to us!

glorified - We've been thinking about 'glory' lately eg. Romans 8:17, 18, 21. For those in Christ, this future is so certain that in v30 it's framed as if it's already taken place!

Instability in the Christian life can come from many sources including: persecution (1 Thess 3:2-4; 2 Thess 1:4); false teaching (2 Thess 2:2-3) and spiritual and moral temptation. But as we think about Paul's teaching in this passage about God's choosing and calling, how does this give sense to why Paul can express such confidence and certainty?

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3. From eternity past to eternity future, God is working out His unbreakable salvation plans for his people. And so there is no room for instability and uncertainty. And yet in v15, we have the double exhortation of 'stand firm' and 'hold fast'. You could think of the illustration of a passenger who needs to take action on a rocking ship. How do we make sense of these exhortations when we should have great certainty and confidence?

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4. To 'hold fast to the teachings (or traditions) we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter' is the exact opposite to what was happening in the church according to 2 Thessalonians 2:2. How do we follow this instruction today?

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This passage ends with the apostle Paul's hope filled prayer. It would be remiss to skip a fundamental truth that comes through in this prayer as well as in his earlier teaching – Love.

V13 - *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit...*

V16 - *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us...*

The Son and the Father are united in their love for the people of God. Christian confidence and stability comes from knowing God's love. How does knowing God's love strengthen us to live a good and godly life (v17)?

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5. Thinking about your tomorrow to come, what is a good deed and word that you could follow up on towards...

Someone in your growth group

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Someone in the broader church family

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Someone who does not yet know Jesus

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Releasing children from poverty
Compassion
in Jesus' name

Compassion

Letter writing Sunday

August 23

2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

We've been covering the initial part of 2 Thessalonians through the framework of:

A. Commendation (1:1-4)

B. Comfort (1:5-12)

C. Correction (2:1-12)

D. Constancy (2:13-17)

Given how chapter 3 starts, 'As for other matters' perhaps we could call this part 'Conclusion', but that would be boring! In fact, this last chapter is packed with joyful confidence and much needed instruction. So a better way for describing the passage we're studying across these final two weeks is:

E. Church Growth as the Word Is Spread (3:1-3)

F. Church Growth as the Word is Obeyed (3:4-18)

Sunday Reflections

What did you find helpful or interesting about Sunday's bible talk on 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3, or what questions did it raise?

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Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

E. CHURCH GROWTH AS THE WORD IS SPREAD (3:1-3)

1. Spend a few minutes writing out in your own words what Paul requests prayer for (v1-2), and then share with the group.

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2. What stands out for you the most in what Paul asks for in prayer?

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3. Across his two letters, this is the second time that the apostle Paul has asked for prayer (See 1 Thessalonians 5:24-25). Does this alter a stereotype picture you might have of Paul as this uber-confident independent effective missionary? If so, in what way?

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4. It's likely that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians during his extended stay in Corinth (See Acts 18:11, 1 Thessalonians 3:6). Looking at the map below, what locations can you imagine that Paul has in mind as he desires for the word of the Lord to spread rapidly?

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5. Paul wants the word of the Lord to spread rapidly and to be honoured as it was with the Thessalonians. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10. How does Paul's description in that passage give us understanding for what 'honoured' means?

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6. According to verses 1-4 there are six figures or 'actors' at work in the activity of evangelism. List them and then discuss this question - Who are you most likely to forget or be less mindful of when you think about evangelism? Why?

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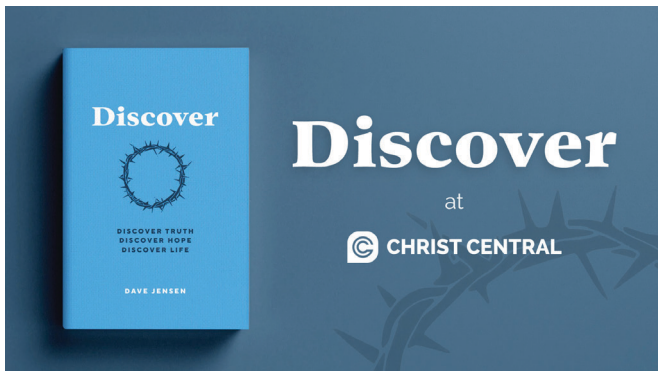
3.

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Prayer

We've spent time studying this passage about prayer. Let's now pray in the way God's word has instructed us.

Pray for the new Discover Course that we've been previewing recently and will be launching later this year.



Pray for Tim & Ruth Zylstra – involved in bible translation in Vanuatu, as well as **Jared and Verena Bradley** (and their kids Noah and Sam) involved in the Berg Church in Tübingen, Germany.



Tim & Ruth Zylstra



Jared and Verena Bradley



Pray for specific people in your life - that they would honour the word of the Lord.

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— STUDY 5 —

2 Thessalonians 3:4-18

We've arrived at our final study of Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica. As we saw last week, chapter 3 can be divided into two parts, and it is the second part we come to today:

Church Growth as the Word Is Spread (3:1-3)

Church Growth as the Word is Obeyed (3:4-18)

Sunday Reflections

What did you find helpful or interesting about Sunday's bible talk on 2 Thessalonians 3:4-18, or what questions did it raise?

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Read the text of 2 Thessalonians 3:4-18 below.

As you read through underline/circle the repeating words or ideas. Afterwards discuss what you came up with.

⁴ We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden

to any of you. ⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. ¹³ And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.

¹⁴ Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. ¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

1. What are the problems in the Thessalonian church that the apostle Paul is addressing?

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2. What's your own relationship with, and view on idleness/laziness?

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3. This isn't the first time the apostle Paul has had to speak on this issue. See 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 and 5:14. What are the problems with idleness according to 1 and 2 Thessalonians? And how does this compare with your own views and reactions to idleness?

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We're not given the reason for this idleness in the Thessalonian church. Some have suggested that these Christians were being influenced by a Greek way of thinking which regarded physical labour as demeaning. Others have suggested that it's due to false teaching that's entered the church about hope and the future (2v1-3). Perhaps, because of a misplaced belief that Jesus had already returned, work was regarded as unimportant and unnecessary.

4. What are the different ways Paul seeks to address this issue in the Thessalonian church family?

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5. You may have picked this up in your early discussion on the text, but there is a certain theme that comes through in the below verses:

- *you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. v4*
- *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. v6*
- *For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule...v10*
- *Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down...v12*
- *Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter...v14*

This is strong, even absolute authority from Paul. How do we make sense of this, especially as earlier on (2v1-2) Paul warned against accepted teaching from others?

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6. We would have to do a more comprehensive bible study on the topic of 'church discipline' but how does 2 Thessalonians teach us about the impact of false teaching, sin and immaturity in church community and how we need to handle it? How does this challenge you?

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Conclusion & Prayer

We have come to the end of our exploration through 2 Thessalonians. Look back over the five studies and share one highlight or challenge that this letter has brought to you. Bring what you've shared into your time of prayer, as well as what you've learnt from 2 Thessalonians 3.

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