

STAND



FIRM



**2 thessalonians** | study guide by crossculture

# INTRODUCTION



In the early first century, Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. It is quite likely that Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians during his eighteen-month stay in Corinth after receiving additional news about the state of the believers, though the precise interval between the two letters remains unknown. The letter suggests that the persecution had intensified (2 Thessalonians 1:4). In addition to that, some false teachers claimed that the day of the Lord had come, which caused distress and confusion to their faith (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). It also seems that Paul's instructions in his first letter for the believers to 'live quietly', 'mind their own affairs', and 'work with their hands' were not heeded by everyone (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

Therefore, in his second letter, Paul firstly encouraged the Thessalonians to remain steadfast in the midst of the escalating persecution, by contrasting what would happen to believers, as opposed to their persecutors (2 Thessalonians 1:3-12). Paul then urged them not to be deceived by the false teaching about the day of the Lord by explaining what must happen before the day of the Lord and encouraging them to hold on to the apostolic teaching (2 Thessalonians 2:1-17). Finally, after coveting their prayers (2 Thessalonians 3:1-5), Paul gave them a strong exhortation concerning the need 'to earth their own living' and the consequences for disobeying such instructions (2 Thessalonians 3:6-13).

One might wonder whether a letter written by a Pharisee-turned-Christian to a group of people living in Roman Macedonia in the mid first-century has any relevance to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians living in a metropolitan city of Melbourne, Australia. However, in the midst of increasing hostility against Christians and Christianity, the circulation of false teachings about the end times even within the church, and the temptation to be complacent in our faith, Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians is both an encouragement and a warning for us today.

# GROWING FAITH



## Context

The church of Thessalonica was established by Paul on his second ministry journey, where he spent three weeks teaching in the Jewish synagogue before being run out of town by a mob of Jews.

However, some of the Jews were persuaded by Paul's preaching and joined him, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women (Acts 17:4). This was the beginning of the church at Thessalonica.

After Paul left Thessalonica, he wrote his first letter to the church shortly after (i.e. 1 Thessalonians). In this first letter, Paul encouraged the church to continue to grow in godliness spurred on by the promise and hope of Christ's return. 2 Thessalonians was written shortly after 1 Thessalonians.

1. Discuss the context in which the church of Thessalonica was established. What might life have been like for the Christians there (Acts 17:1-9)?

## Observation

2. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy had two responses to the Thessalonians. What were these and what was the reason (2 Thessalonians 1:3-4)?



# PERSEVERING FAITH



## Context

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he commended them for their faith and example to other believers (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10). At the start of his second letter, he gave thanks for their growing and persistent faith, even in the face of persecution.

1. Discuss some different ways that Christians might view God in the midst of persecution or suffering.

## Observation

2. How did Paul describe God's judgment against unbelievers? What was the purpose?

## Meaning

3. What does it mean to be made 'worthy of the kingdom of God' (verses 4-5) and 'worthy of his calling' (verse 11)?

4. How is Christ's second coming both a comfort and a warning?

### **Application**

5. How can we encourage one another to remember God's righteousness in times of suffering?

6. Describe a time in your life when a period of suffering has led to a strengthening or refinement of your faith. How can these experiences be used to point people to Jesus and bring glory to God?

# OPPOSITION TO OUR FAITH



## Context

Reflect on the circumstances of the church in Thessalonica in previous studies. In person and in both letters to the Thessalonians (e.g. 2 Thessalonians 2:5), Paul, Silvanus and Timothy encouraged the church to continue to grow in godliness spurred on by the promise and hope of Christ's return.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-12 looks at God's righteous judgement and the return of Christ. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy expanded further on these topics, particularly the return of Christ. It is generally accepted that the times of the Thessalonian church are similar to ours – that the man of lawlessness has not yet been revealed.

## Observation

1. Why was the request that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy made to the Thessalonians (verses 1-2) significant in relation to the whole passage?

2. What were the characteristics and actions of these people?

*Note: You can discuss in separate groups and then bring your answers together.*

	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<b>Brothers and sisters</b>		
<b>Those refusing to love the truth</b>		
<b>Man of lawlessness</b>		
<b>Jesus</b>		

### **Meaning**

3. What is potentially alarming about the day of the Lord?

4. What delusion was held by those who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (verse 12)?

## **Application**

Reflect on how the Christian faith has such an emphasis on truth.

5. What powers, false signs and wonders exist in the world around you?

6. What impacts do those have on your life?

7. How can you not be shaken or alarmed by those?

8. How can you stand firm as a life group against those?

# ENDURING FAITH



## Context

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul clarified how God's people would be gathered to Jesus on his return. He urged the Thessalonians not to be deceived – after the man of lawlessness is revealed, Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his coming.

However, until such time, the man of lawlessness will deceive with counterfeit power, signs and miracles. Some will believe these lies and be condemned for pursuing evil, rather than believing the truth.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, in contrast to those who reject God and stand condemned, Paul assured the Thessalonians about their identity in Christ and exhorted them to persevere through trials.

## Observation

1. What is God's role (in the past, present and future) in the Thessalonians' salvation (verses 13-14)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is the connection between the Thessalonians' salvation (verses 13-14) and Paul's exhortation (verse 15)?

3. What does Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians reveal about God whom he prayed to (verses 16-17)?

## Meaning

4. How did God's choosing and calling of the Thessalonians enable them to stand firm?

## Application

5. How would you describe God's role and our role in proclaiming Christ and making disciples?
6. What circumstances are challenging you from standing firm in faith? How can you find encouragement from this passage?

*Reflect on Paul's prayer (verses 16-17) and pray for those who might be struggling in their faith (e.g. life group members, Global Partners, persecuted Christians, [www.opendoors.org.au](http://www.opendoors.org.au), etc.).*

# PRAYERS OF FAITH



## Context

The book of Acts records the Apostle Paul undertaking three separate missionary journeys, taking him through Greece, Turkey, Syria and numerous other regions. Paul's missionary journeys helped spread the gospel throughout much of the ancient world.

Over the course of his ministry, Paul traveled more than 10,000 miles and established at least 14 churches. Upon arriving in each city, his experience typically followed an established pattern – Paul preached in the synagogue; some people came to believe the words he preached; and the remainder ran Paul out of town (Acts 14:1-7).

1. Recount the context in which the Thessalonians were practising their faith (2 Thessalonians 1-2).

## Observation

2. What was Paul asking prayer for (3:1)?

## Meaning

3. What should the Thessalonians expect from Paul's promise (3:3)?



# FAITH AT WORK



## Context

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul addressed the second coming of Christ and encouraged them to persist in their faith. While in his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul urged them to live quietly, mind their own affairs and work with their own hands (1 Thessalonians 4:11), as well as to admonish the idle (1 Thessalonians 5:14). However, not everyone was living this way.

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you were negatively impacted by someone not pulling their weight? Or perhaps where you did not work as effectively as you should have? How did it impact your relationship or perception of them?

## Observation

2. Describe the example that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy set, as well as their commandments in regards to work for the Thessalonians (verses 6-12).
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is the purpose of keeping away from an idle brother (verses 6, 14-15)?

## Meaning

4. What does it mean to walk in idleness and be a busybody (verse 11)? How might this impact relationships between people?

## Application

5. In which areas of our lives are we tempted towards idleness? How can we guard ourselves against becoming a busybody?
6. How can we honour God not only through our work, but also the attitudes and motivations for our work? How can we encourage one another to 'work quietly' (verse 12) for the Lord?
7. At the start of his letter, Paul gave thanks for the growing and enduring faith of the Thessalonians. He then encouraged them to stand firm. As we are approaching the end of the year, we may be growing weary in doing good (verse 13). How can we encourage one another to remain steadfast?