

40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK



STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO

SIX SESSIONS

FIRST & SECOND

THESSALONIANS

KEEP CALM & CARRY ON

LEVI LUSKO

40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

A WORLD-CHANGING FAITH

SIX-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

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HarperChristian
Resources

40 Days Through the Book: 1 & 2 Thessalonians Study Guide

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The themes of this study are drawn from the video study of the same name by Levi Lusko. All other resources, including the session introductions, small group discussion questions, prayer direction, and the 40 Days learning and reflection exercises, have been written by Kevin and Sherry Harney in collaboration with Levi Lusko.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Welcome to the *40 Days Through the Book* study on 1 and 2 Thessalonians! During the course of the next six weeks, you and your fellow group members will embark on an in-depth exploration of the apostle Paul’s message to the believers in that part of the Mediterranean world. During this study, you will learn approximately when he wrote the books, the audience for whom he wrote, and the background and context in which they were written. But, more importantly, through the teaching by Levi Lusko, you will explore the key themes that Paul relates in these books—and how his teachings relate to you today.

SESSION OUTLINE

The 40 Days Through the Book video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small group gathering) and also as an individual

study. Each session begins with an introduction reading and question. You will then watch a video with Levi Lusko, which can be accessed via the streaming code found on the inside front cover. There is an outline provided in the guide for you to take notes and gather your reflections as you watch the video.

Next, you will engage in a time of directed discussion, review the memory verses for the week, and then close each session with a time of personal reflection and prayer. (Note that if your group is larger, you may wish to watch the videos together and then break into smaller groups of four to six people, to ensure that everyone has time to participate in discussions.)

40-DAY JOURNEY

What is truly unique about this study, and all of the other studies in the *40 Days Through the Book* series, are the daily learning resources that will lead you into a deeper engagement with the text. Each week, you will be given a set of daily readings, with accompanying reflection questions, to help you explore the material that you covered during your group time.

The first day's reading will focus on the key verse to memorize for the week. In the other weekly readings, you will be invited to read a passage from 1 or 2 Thessalonians, reflect on the text, and then respond with some guided journal questions. On the final day, you will review the key verse again and recite it from memory. As you work through the six weeks' worth of material in this section, you will read (and, in some cases, reread) the entire books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Now, you may be wondering why you will be doing this over the course of *forty* days. Certainly, there is nothing special about that number. But there is something biblical about it. In the Bible, the number forty typically designates a time of *testing*. The great flood in Noah's time lasted forty days. Moses lived forty years in Egypt and another forty years in the desert before he led God's people. He spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving God's laws and sent spies, for forty days, to investigate the land of Canaan. Later, God sent the prophet Jonah to warn ancient Nineveh, for forty days, that its destruction would come because of the people's sins.

Even more critically, in the New Testament we read that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and praying. It marked a critical transition point in his ministry—the place where he set about to fulfill the mission that God had intended. During this time Jesus was tested relentlessly by the enemy . . . and prevailed. When he returned to Galilee, he was a different person than the man who had entered into the wilderness forty days before. The same will be true for you as you commit to this forty-day journey through 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

GROUP FACILITATION

You and your fellow group members should have your own copy of this study guide. Not only will this help you engage when your group is meeting, but it will also allow you to fully enter into the *40 Days* learning experience. Keep in mind the video, questions, and activities are simply tools to help you engage

with the session. The real power and life-transformation will come as you dig into the Scriptures and seek to live out the truths you learn along the way.

Finally, you will need to appoint a leader or facilitator for the group who is responsible for starting the video teaching and for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Leaders may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. For more thorough instructions on this role, see the Leader's Guide included at the back of this guide.

INTRODUCTION

I AND 2 THESSALONIANS

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

The letters to God's people in the church in Thessalonica were written by Paul, the Pastor. First and Second Thessalonians came from deep within his pastoral heart. Although there are clear theological underpinnings, Paul's primary focus in these letters is how we should live more than a deep exposition of what we are to believe. These profoundly personal letters were written around AD 50–52 and address what it looks like to live as a Christian. These letters were written to real-life people living in the largest city in Macedonia. This capital city was at the crossroads of the world. Positioned on the Via Egnatia and Thermic Gulf (both travel and trade routes), Thessalonica was a center of culture, religion (of every sort), and trade.

THE BIG PICTURE

When Paul and his ministry companions arrived in the city of Thessalonica, they came battered, bruised, and weary. They had just been in Philippi and had been stripped, flogged, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison. After being miraculously set free from jail and leading a revival meeting with the jailer and his family, they moved on (see Acts 16:16–40). The next stop was Thessalonica (see Acts 17:1–9).

Rather than find a quiet place to lick his wounds and have a little “me time,” Paul went right to the synagogue in Thessalonica and for three weeks in a row he preached the message of Jesus the Messiah. By the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit, some Jews became Jesus followers and many Greeks who were spiritually hungry also came to faith in the Savior.

Once again, conflict arose, mobs incited violence, and the Christians in the city packed up Paul and his ministry companions and sent them on to Berea. They were only in Thessalonica for a couple of months, but Paul fell in love with the people in this fresh new Jesus community.

What happened next is staggering and beautiful! It stands as an example for all Christians, in all places, at all times. The believers in the city of Thessalonica fell so in love with Jesus and followed the Savior with such passion, that word of their faith began to spread from city to city. Paul would show up in a new region to do ministry and the people there were already talking about how the Thessalonian believers had warmly welcomed Paul and his companions, how they had rejected idols and embraced the true and living

God, and how their lives were focused fully on Jesus (see 1 Thessalonians 1:7–10).

In response, Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write two short, power-packed letters to this group of passionate Jesus followers. The first letter is only 89 verses. The second is 47 verses. Think about it, Psalm 119 is 150 verses long. The two letters to the Thessalonian church are only 136 verses combined. Yet, Paul addresses many of the core beliefs and practices Christians of all maturity levels need to know about to honor Jesus and impact the world.

The books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians stand out as deeply pastoral and practical for all believers. If you want to remember what really matters about faith in Jesus and hear the call to follow Jesus on your daily adventure of faith, these books will propel you forward on your journey.

EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that are worthy of our focus. Some of these include:

- **The power of an effective witness.** Be a faithful and passionate follower of Jesus and the world will see and be impacted (1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 1).
- **God delights in resilient faith.** Stand strong in your faith and hang in there, even when things get tough (1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 2).

- **Keep the gospel of Jesus central . . . always.** There are many things that matter, but at the center of our faith and lives should be the good news of Jesus (1 Thessalonians chapter 2).
- **Live with Christian love, care, and family tenderness.** We should be concerned for the well-being of others. Of all the commandments, Jesus was clear that loving people should always be central to who we are and what we do (1 Thessalonians chapter 3).
- **Let Jesus be Lord of all.** Follow Jesus and live for him in every part of your life. This is what it means to be his follower (1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 3).
- **This life is not the end of the story.** Jesus will come again! So, we are to live for our Savior every day and be ready to see him face to face for eternity (1 Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 2).

Thessalonica was positioned on major trade routes—a cultural center and a hub of all sorts of religious activity. If the good news of Jesus could take root in this place, it would spread across the known world. There were travelers in and out of this region daily and they were headed to the ends of the earth . . . literally! The simple truths that God taught these believers through the letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were world-changing. They still are! These same truths can transform your life and continue through you to impact people all over your world.

▶ SESSION ONE

THE WORD IS OUT

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

When we encounter Jesus, the Messiah, everything changes. When our lives are transformed by the power of the Savior, people notice, the word gets out, and the good news spreads.

WELCOME

What does it take for the word to get out? How fast does news spread? At the speed of thought, the typing of a message, and the hitting of a send button. In a world of social media and instant global communication, the word gets out in about thirty seconds.

Good news, bad news, world updates, personal secrets, accurate or inaccurate, news spreads faster than wildfire! It has not always been this way. Just a few short decades ago,

people used phones as a primary means of communication, and they would pass on information to one person at a time. Before that, they sent letters that were hand sorted and delivered days later. The word would get out, but it was much slower. If the average person wanted to get the word on newsworthy stories and topics, they had to wait until evening and turn on their television so they could hear a news anchor report on the day's stories.

In the ancient world of the New Testament, getting the word out was very difficult. No phones, no computers, no TV, no social media. Communication happened person to person and most of it was verbal. A vast part of the population did not read, and the cost of writing materials was high. Even if a letter was written, it had to be hand carried from one place to another. In the days of the apostle Paul, news traveled exceedingly slow.

What was staggering about the church in the city of Thessalonica is that in a world with no social media, phones, or postal services, the word about their faith and love for Jesus moved faster than the apostle Paul could travel. It seemed that everywhere he went, the story of their bold and deep faith got there first.

Imagine if this were to happen to you and your church. What if the story of your church and your personal faith was spreading all over your city, county, and state? What story would be told? What themes would emerge? If someone were to post pictures and stories about how you live for Jesus, would that be a good thing? Would the world be inspired by your example? Would your life of faith draw people to Jesus and bring glory to his name?

SHARE

If someone secretly followed you around for a week and took pictures of what you did and recorded what you said, what are some of the positive things they could tell others to get the word out on your life? What would they see that points to the presence, power, and beauty of Jesus?

WATCH

Play the video for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or key points that stand out to you.

A powerful overview of the Christian journey

1 and 2 Thessalonians is for everyone . . . for both the new believer and the mature follower of Jesus

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Meeting Levi, his family, and a dog named Tabasco

The **Why**: The word was out

The **Who**: Paul and his ministry team

The **First Connection**: Affirmation and Correction

The **Second Connection**: Communication and
Demonstration

The Third Connection: Tribulation and Jubilation

The Fourth and Final Connection: Reception and Transmission

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

- I. What impacted you the most as you watched Levi's teaching on 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10?

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

2. What are signs that we are growing in faith, love, and hope? Which of these three characteristics has been strongest in your life over the past month and how do you see this attribute growing?

What are indicators that a person's faith, love, and hope are waning and need to be rekindled? Which of these three needs more attention in your own life and what is one step you can take to increase it?

3. **Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4–7.** Tell about a person in your life who has clearly communicated the message of the Bible to you. Share one lesson you have learned from this person who models what it looks like to embrace the beauty of God's truth. How are you seeking to follow the example of this person and teach the message of the Bible to another person?

THE WORD IS OUT

4. Describe different ways God pricks our heart, holds up a mirror for us to see something wrong, or wakes us up to an area of much needed growth. Why do you think God does this? Tell about a time God did this in the past or how he is doing it right now. What does God want to transform in you, and how can your group members be part of this journey of growth?

5. **Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6–10.** Describe, in your own words, what the people around the ancient world were saying about the Christians in the Thessalonian church. What would it mean in your community today if everyone was saying the same sorts of things about you and the members of your congregation?

6. Tell about a person who you long to come to faith in Jesus. How can your group members support you and inspire you in your journey of gospel transmission to this person?

MEMORIZE

Each session, you will be given a key verse from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verse is 1 Thessalonians 1:3:

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

Have everyone recite this verse out loud. Ask for any volunteers who would like to say the verse from memory.

RESPOND

What will you take away from this session? What is one practical next step you can take to carry the love and truth of Jesus to the unique places you go in the flow of a normal week?

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for the people in your life who have lived as an example of mature faith.

THE WORD IS OUT

- Ask God to help you live in a way that communicates the love and good news of Jesus and that also demonstrates the love and grace of Jesus.
- Pray for your group members to experience deep and lasting joy, even in times of tribulation.
- Lift up a prayer for one person in your personal circle who really needs to receive the gospel of Jesus. Offer yourself to God and invite him to use you to share Jesus naturally with this person.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reflect on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin by reviewing the key verse to memorize for the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, the last day, you will review the key verse and reflect on what you have learned for the week.

DAY 1

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting 1 Thessalonians 1:3:

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

Now try to say the verse from memory.

Reflect: Take time throughout the day to take note of your words, actions, attitudes, motives. Pay special attention to where your faith is alive and active. Think about what people see and might be saying about you and your faith. Be humble and honest. Without being prideful, what are ways you can let your faith in Jesus be noticed by the people you encounter in a normal day?

DAY 2

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1-2.

Reflect: We can speak well of other believers and local churches. Take time this week to learn about a church in your community (other than the one you attend). Browse their website. You may want to ask a friend or neighbor about the church they attend and what they love about their church family and the ministry of their church. Then, make a point of telling others (in your church, other churches, or even non-believers) about the good things you have heard about that church. Get the word out and bless that church. You might even write a note to their pastor and thank them for their ministry.

Journal:

- List ways you could affirm and celebrate the lives of Christians you know. Be specific and be sure these are doable and practical. Also, include one action you can take to get out the good word.
- What keeps you from affirming other people and churches? What can you do to overcome this obstacle?

Pray: Ask God for eyes to see the good things in other believers and churches. Then, pray for the Holy Spirit to give you courage to speak well of this person or church in public settings.

DAY 3

Read: 1 Thessalonians 3–4.

Reflect: Use your journal space below to make a list of three Christians you know who are really seeking to follow Jesus. Next to their names, write one or two positive behaviors or actions you see in their lives. Then, send them a text, email, or call to affirm them for being a wonderful example for you and others.

Journal:

- List of behaviors you see in mature Christians that inspire you to be more like Jesus.
- Write a prayer asking God to infuse you with Holy Spirit power to adopt one of these behaviors for yourself.

Pray: Ask God to give you courage to regularly and consistently affirm the people in your life. Pray for eyes to see the good examples of others and adopt these God-honoring practices in your own life.

DAY 4

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5.

Reflect: Make an effort to align your words and your actions. Look for times you say something but fail to act on it. Christians are notorious for saying things like, “I’ll pray for you,” and then

they forget to pray. If this happens to you, consider one of these solutions: (1) Don't say, "I'll pray for you." Instead, say, "May I pray for you right now?" Then, do it. (2) If you say you will pray, stop right then and there, and add a daily reminder on your phone so you have a pop-up every day for a week. (3) The minute you have open time following the encounter when you promised to pray, carve out a few minutes to lift up the need you promised to pray for.

Pick one area of your life where there is no alignment between words and actions and make a plan to correct it.

Journal:

- Write down the area you want to work on aligning your words and actions.
- Write down two or three ways you can take a practical step to make this alignment.

Pray: Ask God to open your eyes to see where your words and actions need to be consistent.

DAY 5

Read: 2 Thessalonians 1.

Reflect: Read Acts 16:16–40 and study the situation and attitudes of Paul and Silas. Read Philippians 4:4–7 and reflect on how these words relate to a situation such as the one Paul faced in Acts 16. Think about how you respond to hard times and what happens to your joy quotient in these difficult situations.

Journal:

- Write down your thoughts as you read Acts 16:16–40 and Philippians 4:4–7.
- Take note of how you tend to respond in hard times and how much joy (or lack of joy) you have when times are tough.

Pray: Ask God to help you keep your eyes on him and your heart joyful in the tough times of life. Pray for people you love who are going through painful situations right now. Ask the Holy Spirit of the Living God to breathe joy into their heart and lives.

DAY 6

Read: 2 Thessalonians 2–3.

Reflect: We all know people (family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers . . .) who have never received the amazing grace of Jesus. Take time to pray for each one, asking God to open their heart to the prompting and invitation of the Spirit.

Journal:

- Write the names of three to five people you know who are not yet followers of Jesus.
- Make a list of simple and practical ways you can serve them in the name of Jesus: pray for them, make a meal or do some other act of kindness for them, seek to share what your relationship with Jesus means to you.

Pray: Ask God to give you the right words and courage to have a spiritual conversation with at least one person that you write about in the journal section above.

DAY 7

Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting 1 Thessalonians 1:3:

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

Reflect: Our words have power. More power than most of us recognize. Take ten minutes to review your recent texts and emails that are personal in nature. Honestly and humbly ask yourself if your words are thoughtful and gracious. Or, are they sharp and harsh? In the coming days, seek to be as gracious and kind as you can with your words—both written and spoken—while still communicating what needs to be said.