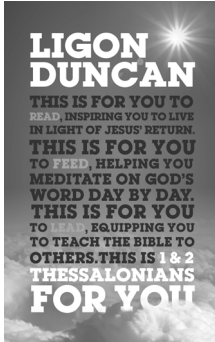




In light of his return

1 & 2 Thessalonians

by Ligon Duncan



1 & 2 Thessalonians For You

If you are reading *1 & 2 Thessalonians For You* alongside this Good Book Guide, here is how the studies in this booklet link to the chapters of *1 & 2 Thessalonians For You*:

Study One → Ch 1-2	Study Five → Ch 8-10
Study Two → Ch 3-4	Study Six → Ch 11
Study Three → Ch 5	Study Seven → Ch 12-13
Study Four → Ch 6-7	Study Eight → Ch 14

Find out more about *1 & 2 Thessalonians For You* at:
www.thegoodbook.com/for-you

In Light of His Return

The Good Book Guide to 1 & 2 Thessalonians

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Introduction: Good Book Guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, moms and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. The **Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance for questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- ⋮ **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jigsaw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that’s not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and, your church. ☒ **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with his concerns, purposes, and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.

Why study 1 & 2 Thessalonians?

Some people complain that Christianity is all about “pie in the sky by and by.” They say we need to jettison our escapism—our thinking about heaven and the future return of Christ—in order to do a good job of living *this* life. If it’s all about heaven, the charge goes, we’re never going to be any earthly good.

But that charge misses the point of all the teaching in the Bible about the return of Jesus and the end of this world. Scripture is written not so that we don’t care about this life but so that we live this life well—and its teaching about the future is a crucial part of that. In fact, you cannot live this life well if you’re not living it in light of the second coming of Christ.

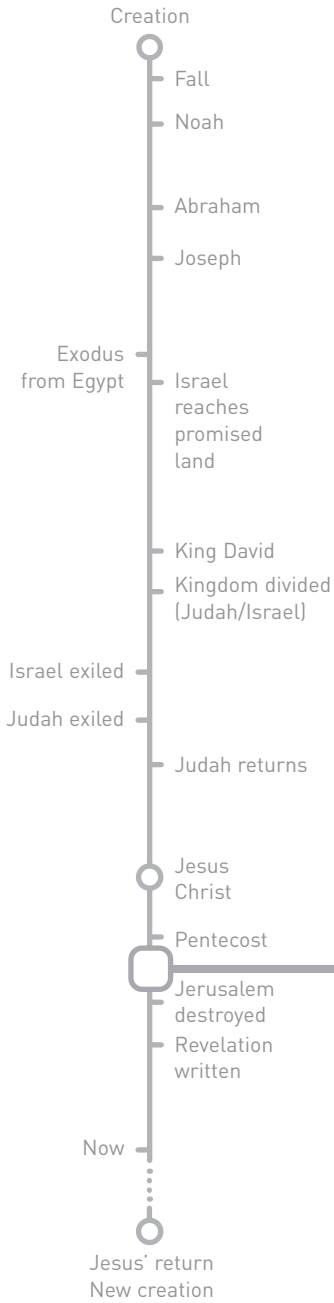
Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians are two of the earliest parts of the New Testament. They were written less than 20 years after Jesus died and rose again. And they are filled with references to his second coming—since, from the earliest times, faith in Jesus would not have made sense without his return.

The letters were written to a young church plant, set up by Paul during his missionary trip to the Roman province of Macedonia (in modern-day Greece) in AD 49 or 50. Acts 17:1-10 tells us the story of how Paul preached about Jesus but was forced out of the city by those who had rejected the gospel. Paul’s time with this fledgling church was short—but 1 & 2 Thessalonians show us how he continued to teach these new Christians and pray for them from afar.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul’s love for the church he had founded is on full display as he encourages these Christians to live to please God—that is, to grow in godliness: in their relationships, their work, their mourning, and their honoring of their leaders. His second letter implies that the persecution had worsened and had become unremitting; Paul explains why Christians face such suffering and how to continue in faith and love in the face of it.

In both letters, Paul links his exhortations to the coming return of the Lord Jesus. He wants the believers to endure trials and live life in light of Jesus’ future coming: to stand fast in their faith in the certain hope of future glory.

These two letters open a window onto church life among the earliest Christians. But it is striking how they speak to our churches in the 21st century too. We, too, need to heed the call to remember that we are waiting for Jesus, the risen Son of God, to return from heaven. We, too, need to be exhorted to live to please God in our lives. We, too, need the gospel to shape us. Then we will become imitators of the Lord and an example to all believers (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7).



BIBLE TIMELINE

Where do the books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians fit into the whole story of God's word?

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS 49-51 AD

1

1 Thessalonians 1

THE WORD SOUNDED FORTH



talkabout

1. How would you describe what it means to become a Christian?



investigate

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

2. Paul is writing to believers in Thessalonica—but what else (or rather, who else) are they “in” (v 1)? What do you think this means?

DICTIONARY

Thessalonians (v 1): people from Thessalonica, a city in the north of what is now Greece.

Conviction (v 5): certainty.

Affliction (v 6): suffering.

Macedonia and Achaia

(v 7): two regions in what is now Greece.

3. What does the Thessalonians’ faith look like in their lives (v 3)?

4. These believers have become Christians fairly recently. How does Paul describe this (v 4-5)?

5. What was God's role in all of this?



explore more

optional

Paul knows that the Thessalonians are elect—chosen by God (v 4). In other words, their salvation didn't begin with them figuring something out or being a good person. It began with the love of God.

▶ Read Ephesians 1:3-6

According to these verses, when did God choose us?

What does God's choosing of us mean that we become?

Why did God do this?

How is this comforting to Christians who struggle with sin or feel they are not good enough?

Paul thanks God that when he preached the gospel in Thessalonica, it didn't just come in his words; it came with converting, saving power (1 Thessalonians 1:5). The gospel is communicated in words, but it is not just words. Through it, the Holy Spirit transforms lives.



apply

6. Think about your approach to evangelism. How might the truths we have just read impact on the way we share the gospel, the prayers we pray, and the pressure we put on ourselves?

getting personal

Is there one lesson here that particularly impacts you personally? Perhaps it's a truth you hadn't thought about before or a helpful correction to your attitude toward evangelism. You might find it helpful to write it down to help you remember it.

pray

Share about one person each with whom you would like to share the gospel, and pause to pray together for those people.

investigate

Wherever the gospel is accepted, the Holy Spirit is at work. He comes to convert, and he comes to sanctify. Paul next tells us more about how the Spirit was at work in Thessalonica.

7. What have the Thessalonian believers done, and what impact has this had (v 6-10)?



8. What kind of example do you think your church sets to other believers?

9. What does verse 6 tell us about what the Christian life is like?

10. What specific new beliefs have the Thessalonians embraced (v 9-10)?



getting personal

The Thessalonians were worshipers of pagan idols. But their story is our story too. All of us struggle with idolatry. An idol is anything in which we think we can find ultimate security and satisfaction, instead of in God. When we became Christians, we turned away from those things; but we also have to continue to turn away from them.

Here are three questions to help you identify any idols you need to turn away from.

What do you think about when you're not thinking about anything else?

How do you spend your time, resources, and energy?

What disappoints you, or what would make you feel worthless if you lost it or failed at it?

Take some time on your own to prayerfully think through these questions. Then decide on what steps you can take to turn away from the idols you have identified!



apply

11. These beliefs clearly had a huge impact in their lives (v 3). Why does each of these beliefs transform us?

12. The Thessalonian Christians made the gospel visible: in other words, their lives displayed the fact that the gospel is real and true. In what ways can this also be true of us today?

pray

Pray for one another in the light of your answers to questions 11 and 12.

