

STUDY 8 Resolute

1. vs 12,13 Support for leaders
vs 14,15 Dealing with difficult people
vs 16-18 Personal worship
vs 19-22 Public worship
2. Select one practice i.e way we are to live (e.g. v.13 live in peace) - to discuss the three questions. You might consider the following general observations:
 - a) A Christian perspective:
 - looks for God's guidance/teaching on the matter;
 - considers the impact of our actions on - others/our relationship with God/our church etc;
 - ⇒ A non-Christian perspective can be more self centred – how does this affect me?
3. Consider the example of Joseph (Genesis 50:19-21).
4. This question asks people to share what works for them – or where they need help. In Study 4 Sharing Time (p.11) we considered strategies for reading the Bible. How can we become a more prayerful community of believers?
5. Allocate one chapter of 1 Thessalonians to different people and ask them to describe the main theme/s as a single heading. Use these to prepare a draft summary of the entire book. Keep working on this until you have reduced your summary to a sentence.
⇒ Conclude the study by everyone reading aloud

'Like the Sunshine'.

Leader's Notes

9:3...

Baxt...

**UNDER THE
SPOTLIGHT**

Introduction

Thessalonica was founded around 300-400 B.C and became the capital of the province of Macedonia, in modern day Greece. Its Aegean Sea harbour and location at the intersection of two major Roman highways made it a strategic shipping and trading port. Paul wrote this letter from Corinth around 51 AD, several months after his brief visit in his second missionary journey. The church had a Jewish/Gentile background, although it was predominantly Gentile.

These studies seek to provide a balance between understanding the text and sharing of personal experiences and perceptions. Where suggestions are given, they are not intended to replace (or correct!) discussions. Rather, treat them as a resource which may be 'drip fed' into your group's considerations.

Consider the Sharing and Prayer times as an integral part of each study, rather than optional extras. The Reflections could be reviewed as an introduction to your next meeting.

STUDY 1. A Good Start

1. Consider the matters raised by Paul in vs 4-6 especially:
 - v.4 chosen by God – It was God who called and convicted them. Although this raises the difficult doctrine of election (see Rom 8:29), it is sufficient to see their good start came from God's choosing of them.
 - v.5 our words came to you with power – the Gospel changes people (2 Tim 3:16).
 - v.5 With the Holy Spirit – God's Spirit was working in and through them – (John 14:26, Rom 8:26,27).
 - v.6 They learned from the examples of Paul and Jesus.
2. Break into groups to write suggestions. Transcribe these to an outline drawing of a church. You might consider:
 - Metaphors of the church: Rom 12:4+; Behaviour: Col 2:2.⇒ When sharing experiences: seek a balance between negative and positive experiences.
3. Consider:
 - the information in the Reflection section;
 - the role of the adverbs '**produced**' by faith, '**prompted**' by love and '**inspired**' by hope;
 - the meaning of work, labour and endurance.⇒ **Work** refers to our relationship/walk with God, which must be based on faith (Heb 11:6).
⇒ **Labour** refers to the good works we do as Christians, which should be motivated by love (1 Cor 13:3).
⇒ **Endurance** refers to our ongoing, lasting commitment, which results from our hope in Jesus's return (Phil 3:20).
 - Rev 2:2 illustrates the problem when deeds and perseverance are not motivated by love (Rev 2:4).

STUDY 7 Ready and Waiting

1. Begin with this reading:

Warning: This question will bring out strong emotions.

Notwithstanding our belief in Heaven, it hurts to lose someone we love. It is therefore somewhat ironic that death is evidence of God's compassion! When Adam and Eve sinned, do you know why God threw them out of the garden? Look up Gen 3:22 BEFORE you continue.

If they had eaten from the tree of life, mankind's sinful nature would have continued forever. By preventing them from gaining eternal life – that is, by allowing them (and us) to die – God ensured our struggle with sin and temptation will come to an end. Jesus' triumph over sin and death (Col 2:14) doesn't mean we won't continue sinning or encounter temptation this side of Heaven. It achieved much more – the forgiveness of those sins and the surety of eternal life with him. The last point is what this chapter is all about. We will now turn to this week's study..

2. Read 2 Sam 12:15-23 for an example of a balanced approach
3. The negatives in the passage require us to read it carefully. Paul does not want us to grieve like others who have no hope. Rather, it is OK to grieve – provided we realise we will join our loved ones on the day of resurrection. Grieving is normal and appropriate. Loss of hope is not.
5. This is a variation on the old question – would you want to know when and where you will die? To which the classic response is 'Definitely! – so I can make sure I am not there!'
 - Read ch 5:1-3 What does this say about when Jesus will return?
 - What should be our response to this expectation? See Vs 4,6
 - Should knowing the actual date make any difference? Why or why not?

v.6 no one should **wrong or take advantage** of a brother or sister. (1 Cor 6:8,9)

v.7 For God **did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life**. (1 Pet 1:14,15)

4. The key word here is “demonstrate”.

a) How would you explain:

- Jn 13:34,35?
- What it means to ‘love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia’ (v.10)?

b) A social group shares some form of common interest. Would you describe Christianity as merely a common interest? Why or why not?

5. **Some thoughts to consider:**

- Does our desire to appear relevant lull us into acting like everyone else? (Such as treating Sunday like others do – apart from attending Church!)
- If God will forgive us anyway, does it matter if we let our standards slip? (Rom 6:1,2)
- Billy Graham avoided sexual temptation by never socialising with a woman without someone else being present. He also gave the hotel TV remote to a friend so he wouldn’t be tempted to watch porn. Was he being extreme or did he appreciate the danger (real or perceived) of sexual temptation?
- Christian morality is not primarily rules, but relationship. The more we love God, the better we become at avoiding the guilt that comes from giving in to temptation.

STUDY 2. Transformed

1. Charades highlights the value of role modelling. Often, we copy what we observe others doing. You could ‘suggest’ that Charades illustrates integrity, as its rules prohibit the common cop out for poor behaviour “do as I say rather than do as I do.” 😞

2. Consider Paul’s language (plus the definitions provided:)

v.6 imitators – followed their example;

V.6 welcomed the message – a positive, not reluctant response;

V.7 you became a model – they were worth following;

V.9,10 what others said—the difference was obvious.

3. **After** your discussion, read this to the group:

They went everywhere gossiping about the good news which had brought joy, release and a new life to themselves. They did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing. Consequently, they were taken seriously, and the movement spread."

Michael Green—Evangelism in the Early Church

4. Encourage a practical, rather than theoretical discussion. Perhaps some could share a positive and/or a negative experience. It might be helpful to discuss the Sharing time question here.

Conclude with this reading:

Christian role modelling involves more than imitation or outward copying of others. Rather, it is to learn from those who model a growing walk with Jesus. If we are being transformed, we should strive to be able to say ‘Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.’ Our motivation must be to draw others closer to Christ, rather than big noting ourselves.

Christian Psychologist

5. The lessons from vs 1-10 demonstrate that God's power in evangelism is not limited by our ability (Our availability may raise other issues!) The question seeks to encourage established Christians to recognize the opportunities presented by their greater knowledge and maturity.

You might find it helpful to use some of these thought starters:

- Unlike new believers, mature Christians might not be able to point to sudden behavioural changes, because God dealt with their immaturity long ago;
- The preaching of the Gospel has done much to convince and convert, but the lives of sincere followers of Christ has done much more;
- People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care;
- Its easier for new Christians to evangelise because they have more non-Christian contacts than older Christians – but would you prefer to be taught by a beginner?

STUDY 3 Authentic

1. Do not be concerned if you find it hard to distinguish his attitude from his behaviour. The question is focused on how Paul defends his integrity – which is then applied in Q.6
 - a) **Message** – summarise how Paul describes the gospel – especially 1:5, 2:1, 2:13
 - b) **Attitude** - Look for words of intention, motive or purpose
 - c) **Behaviour**—look for statements describing his conduct, actions or how he treated them.
2. Before you answer this, it is helpful to work out who his opponents might be. You can do this by working backward from his defence to determine what accusations he is responding to.

STUDY 6 Standing Firm

This study encourages honest discussion about a matter which many Christians consider is private. Sensitivity is recommended!

1. We will look at issues which are seldom discussed in polite company. Some may find references to sex awkward or embarrassing. This highlights one of the benefits of studying a book – the Bible, rather than the preacher, sets the agenda!

2. **Begin** by reading this out to your group:

Think in terms of a busy commercial port where greed and personal gratification rules. Sex is just another commodity – to be exploited for profit or pleasure. While marriage is common, so too are affairs and casual sex. Modern concerns over consent, domestic violence, sexual orientation and child exploitation barely raise an eyebrow – even the temples promote prostitution as a form of idol worship. And then, a bunch of people discover Jesus... and it seems their former ways are no longer acceptable.

3. Before or during your discussion look up these verses

v.1 ...we instructed you **how to live** (Eph 4:1)

v.3 It is **God's will** (Eph 5:15-17)

that you should be **sanctified** (1 Cor 6:11).

Sanctification means used for the purpose God intends, living according to God's design and purpose.

avoid sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:18—20, Eph 5:3—5)

v.4 **learn to control your own body** (Heb 13:4)

v.5 not in **passionate lust** (Rom 1;26,27)

like the **pagans**, (Eph 4:17—19)

who do **not know God**; (Gal 4:8)

- b) Encourage people to share their knowledge of a particular situation. How would you have responded?

Consider 2 Cor 2:5-8

Read out the following extracts

The Epistles are full of examples of problems in the church where some people were weak while others were strong. Paul's exhortation is to encourage and build each other up through God's truth. At times this might entail admonishing another Christian who is not living a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

See also Col 3:15-17, 1 Thess 2:11-12)

Admonishment is high-octane encouragement. The word literally means "putting in mind." To admonish is to deposit truth into a person's thoughts. It might take the form of discipline, encouragement, or affirmation. It may be commendation or correction. Above all, admonishment is truth spoken into a difficult circumstance. It inserts the chlorine tablet of veracity into the algae of difficulty.

5. v.12 **increase** – implies multiplication – love that is stronger this year than last year,

overflow – superabundant – as in overfilling a container.

The combination of these two words reinforces how growing in love is an ongoing work in progress.

See also Jn 13:34,35; Phil 1:9; 2 Thess 1:3.

Use the following suggestions, when appropriate.

It seems Paul responds to criticism from two groups; Jews from the synagogue and the Thessalonians themselves. His main response to Jewish criticism comes in vs 14-16, where he also denounces their anti-Gentile motives (v.16).

His other critics seem to be Gentiles from both inside and outside the congregation who questioned his methods and motivation. The Christian values Paul encouraged would have clashed with the pagan worldview of a busy port city. His defence also suggests he sought to distinguish himself from the many religious charlatans who earned their living by peddling their philosophies.

4. Restrict your discussion to the Corinthian passages. Later you might refer to verses about our motivation to share the Gospel, such as 1 Cor 9:16; 2 Cor 5:14,15; Phil 1:20 -22, 2 Tim 2:10.

5. Try for a genuine discussion of the advantages/ difficulties arising from our different personalities. Avoid guilt tripping and/or 'trite' answers, such as God will supply the words (which is true!)

6. The correct reference is 1 Cor 9:24+ Conclude by reading:

Perfection is not required or possible in this life. But to be authentic Christians, we should be progressing in thankfulness and prayer; faith in Christ and the gospel; love for one another; and the hope laid up for us in heaven.

STUDY 4 Responders

The questions this week are loosely based on the themes in the passage! They are intended to provoke discussion by raising issues where the answers are not always clear-cut, or different opinions may (or perhaps may not!) be acceptable.

2. If the Bible is not the inspired word of God, how do we know which bits are important? Alternatively, what can we ignore?

Use the following suggestions as you discuss each “thought”:

- ⇒ This question is based on a false assumption! No Bible believing preacher would claim they are creating new scripture, or their message is as important as God’s revelation to mankind. Rather a sermon should help us understand what the Bible says and how this impacts our lives. We should ALL be concerned if a preacher claims to have a new revelation from God!
- ⇒ There is a difference between dismissing something as cultural and recognising circumstances have changed. For example, Jesus’ death replaced the need for OT sacrifices (Heb 10:11-14); love transforms some OT laws (Mth 5:21,22). Hair fashions are cultural (1 Cor 11:14).
- ⇒ People’s unwillingness to accept the Gospel does not detract from its power (1Thess 1:5b). God is patient (2 Pet 3:9). Perhaps we could communicate better! (1 Per 3:15).
- 4. Why Judaism opposes Christianity: (See 1 Thess 2:15,16)
- ⇒ **Similarity:** Jews reacted to (perceived) false doctrine.
- ⇒ **Difference:** Jews sought to prevent Gentiles from knowing God, whereas we hope for the conversion of unbelievers, including JW’s and Mormons (Mth 28:19).
- ⇒ Both Jesus and Paul anticipated it (Jn 15:18+, (2 Tim 3:12)
- 5. v.18 The word used commonly refers to the breaking up of a road to make it impassable. It also describes an athlete 'cutting in' during a race so another runner’s path is obstructed.
 - Satan could be responsible (1 Pet 5:8).
 - However, there may be other reasons (James 4:2,3)

STUDY 5 Connected

2. Paul was concerned about:

- ◆ their severe suffering (1:6);
- opposition (2:2);
- suffering the same things other churches suffered from the Jews (2:12);
- persecution (3:4)

What other trials might challenge our faith?

- ◆ Seek honest responses. Being challenged (Rom 8:37) is not the same as abandoning our faith (1 Tim 4:1).

3. Before you instinctively agree, consider the following:

- Are all of these characteristics present in ANY New Testament church? Many of the Epistles (letters) were written to correct problems. Even in Thessalonians, which seemed to be going well, Paul rebuked idlers, who were bludging off other members (2 Thess 3:6,10).
 - Many of the qualities occur in the “one another” teachings about the Christian life (eg Eph 4:32). Is it possible the quotation is aspirational - what church members should strive to achieve - rather than describing standards that few churches (NT or modern) could attain?
 - If a church is not developing in all (many) of these areas, does that make it “unsuccessful”?
 - How do you feel when you hear of a highly effective/ successful church? Encouraged? Envious? Other?
4. a) Discuss the lack of compassion/rejection/condemnation often shown by society. What does this reveal about the general community’s attitude to Christianity?