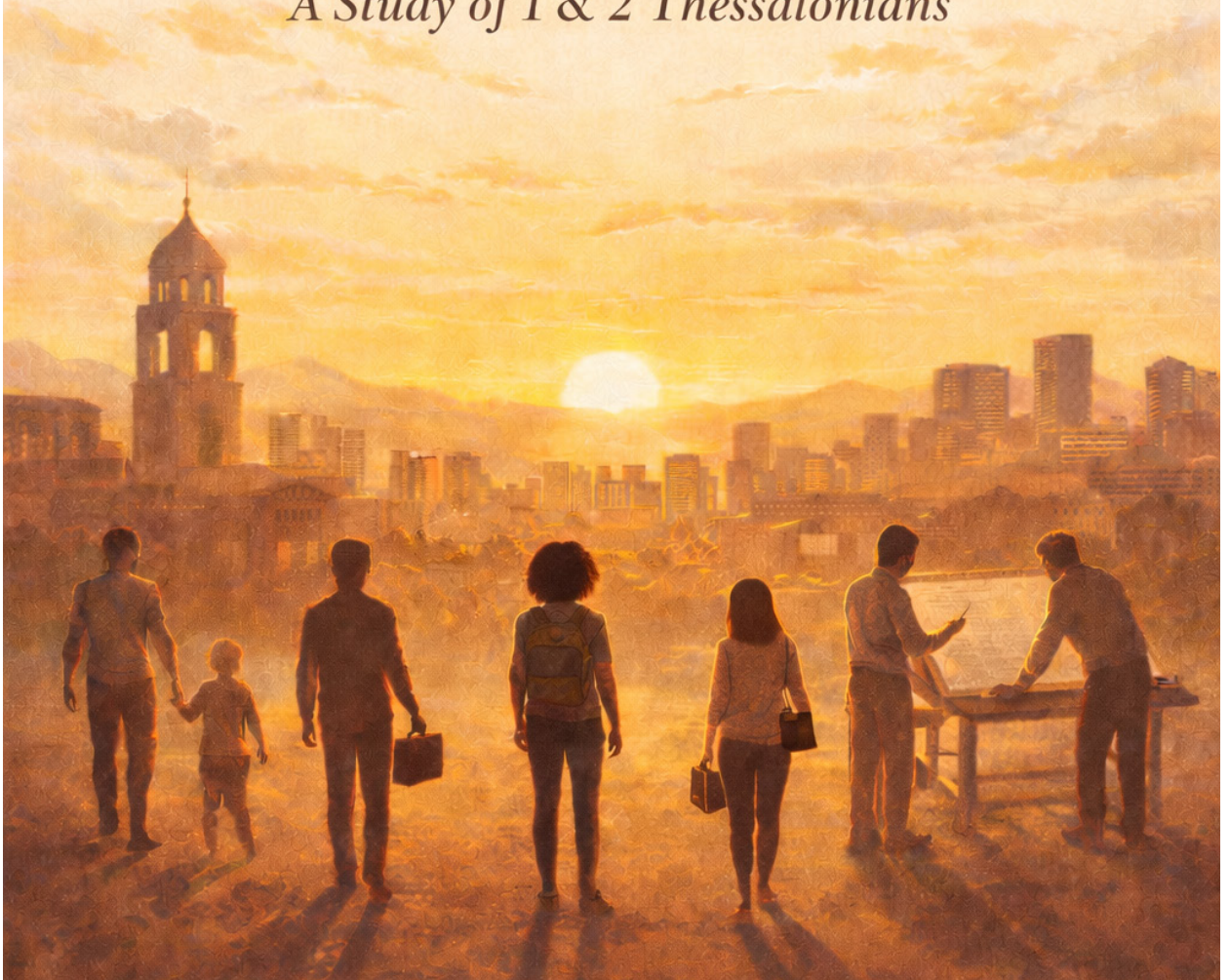


STAND STRONG

EVERYDAY FAITH IN LIGHT *of* ETERNITY

A Study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians



Stand Strong: Everyday Faith in Light of Eternity

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INTRODUCTION

*“So then, brothers, **stand firm** and hold to the traditions (teachings) that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them **in every good work and word.**”*

- 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17

The letters to the Thessalonians are among the earliest writings of the Apostle Paul, addressed to a young church learning how to follow Jesus in a world that was often confused, hostile, and spiritually divided. They were written circa AD 50-51.

During his second missionary trip (Acts 17), Paul established the church in Thessalonica, a large, bustling seaport city in Macedonia with over 200,000 residents. However, he was forced to flee shortly after founding the church, and he became concerned for the believers there. He sent Timothy to check on them a few months later. It is Timothy’s report that prompts these letters.

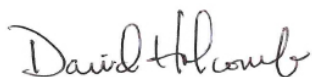
Paul was “comforted” by the news he received. Instead of retreating into culture and drifting from Paul’s teachings, the Thessalonians had remained steadfast. Their faith demonstrated courage. Their love for one another grew. Their hope in Christ’s return influenced their daily lives. Paul writes to praise and encourage them — and us — to stay strong and continue in these ways.

Throughout this study, we will observe Paul weaving together three recurring themes: **faith that pleases God, love that encourages others, and hope that anticipates Jesus’ return.** Each passage urges us to live with spiritual clarity in a culture of confusion, moral integrity in a world of compromise, and steady confidence in times of suffering.

Ultimately, the primary purpose of these letters isn't just to guide Christian living but to invite us to faithfulness each day, with eternity in mind. Paul reminds us that we don't stand firm by our own power, but because "*the Lord is faithful — He will surely do it*" (1 Thess. 5:24). We hold on, because we are being held. We stay faithful because our hope and future glory are rooted in the promise of everlasting life in the presence of our Almighty God.

As we journey through these inspired letters — from gospel transformation to holy living, from steadfast hope to absolute truth — may God establish our hearts, shape our lives, and anchor us in Him, so that we can ***Stand Strong*** until He returns or calls us home!

Because He lives,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "David Holcomb". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "David" and last name "Holcomb" clearly legible.

David Holcomb

Discipleship Pastor, River Oaks Community Church

UNIT 1 - STAND STRONG IN THE GOSPEL

God's Grace Transforms How We Live

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

- Read *1 Thessalonians 1:1-10*, paying close attention to Paul's opening remarks.
 - Reread and note specifically anything that points to what God has done and how the Thessalonians have responded.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear the word “**transformed**,” what comes to mind—a story, an image, a person, or an experience?

2. What do we know about Paul’s history and relationship with this young church (Acts 17, 1 Thess. 3:1-6)? How does context explain the tone of his greeting?

3. Early in the greeting, Paul highlights three hallmarks of Christian maturity seen in the Thessalonians’ life and witness — what are they? How can these traits be expressed in the practice of everyday faith today?

4. The gospel came to the Thessalonians in _____, in _____, in the _____, and with full _____ (1:5). How do each of these relate to receiving the gospel—in general and in your life testimony?

5. Paul writes that the gospel “*sounded forth*” from the Thessalonians (1:8). What does he mean by this? Why was their witness credible and compelling to the world around them? Does the gospel *sound forth* in your life? Why or why not?
6. Paul says that since these believers had received the gospel, they had turned “*from idols to serve God*” (1:9). How does living in light of eternity help us turn away from our idols? How do/will you turn to God over idols in your life?
7. What theological truths are found in verse 10? Explain the importance of each one. Specific to anticipating Christ’s return, how does that help us **stand strong**? How do you (or will you) live with the expectation of His return?
- Closing Prayer based on **1 Thess. 1:3** (use us/our in group) – Lord, strengthen my work of faith, deepen my labor of love, and establish my steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ, the One who saved me, transformed my life, and is returning to restore me for all eternity. Help me stand strong each day. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 2 – STAND STRONG IN INTEGRITY

Living a Life of Pure Motives

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

- Read *1 Thessalonians 2:1-16*, paying close attention to Paul's description of his ministry when he was with them.
 - Reread and note any reference to Paul's motives, methods, and manner of life while serving the Thessalonians.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear about someone with “**pure motives**,” who comes to mind? What makes that person’s life example credible, compelling, or influential?
2. What do we know about the challenges Paul had faced elsewhere (Acts 16:19-24). How did those trials shape the way he ministered in Thessalonica (2:1-2)?
3. In verses 3–6, Paul lists several things his ministry *did not* include. What are they? Why would these traits have undermined the gospel? How can we guard ourselves from these temptations today?
4. Paul uses the metaphors of a _____ and an _____ (2:7-12) to describe his posture toward the Thessalonians. What qualities from each image stand out to you? How do these images help define godly leadership and relational discipleship?

5. According to verse 8, Paul was “*affectionately desirous*” of them and shared both the gospel and his own life. What does it mean to share both message and life? How does this deepen Christian community? How do we do this today?

6. How did the Thessalonians receive Paul’s teaching (2:13-14)? How does this conviction help believers **stand strong** in seasons of opposition and suffering?

7. This passage ends by reminding us that following Jesus can bring suffering. How have integrity, hope, and conviction helped you get through tough times? Have you seen God use trials to refine your motives and deepen your faith?

- Closing Prayer based on **1 Thess. 2:12** (use us/our/we in group) – Lord, help me walk in a manner worthy of you. Strengthen me to live with integrity, purity of motive, genuine love, and affection toward my brothers and sisters. Encourage and guide me to stand strong and bring honor to you today. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 3 – STAND STRONG IN ENCOURAGEMENT

Spiritual Friendships Strengthen our Faith

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

- Read *1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13*, paying close attention to how Paul expresses his deep concern and care for other believers.
 - Reread and note the descriptions of Paul's affection, desire, and longing for being with the believers in Thessalonica.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear the phrase “**I long to see you,**” what or who comes to mind? What emotions does this trigger? How is it different from, “*Maybe I’ll see you next time I’m in town.*”
2. What hindered Paul from staying in and returning to Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-15, 1 Thess. 2:17-18)? What does this tell us about spiritual opposition?
3. Paul calls the Thessalonians his “*glory and joy*” (2:19–20). What does he mean, and what does it reveal about his heart for people? How does loving others deeply strengthen a church? How can we love others in this way?
4. Timothy was sent to _____ and _____ the Thessalonian believers in their faith (3:2). Explain what these words mean and how this would have helped them stand strong during trials. How can we seek this out for ourselves?

5. Verses 3 and 4 are sobering, even contrary to how many see the gospel as free from suffering. What is Paul trying to teach us about this reality of suffering? How does this affect the way you understand, live out, and share the gospel?

6. The “*good news*” Timothy brings back relates to which two attributes of the Thessalonians’ spiritual health (3:6)? Where are these at work in your life?

7. Paul prays that the Lord would “*make you increase and abound in love*” and “*establish your hearts*” (3:12–13). Which part of this prayer do you need most right now to **stand strong**? Why?

- Closing Prayer based on **1 Thess. 3:12-13** (use us/our in group) – Lord, make me increase and abound in love. Establish my heart in holiness. Strengthen me to stand strong, encourage others, and live with the anticipation of your return. May the news of my faith and love be counted as “good” before you. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 4 – STAND STRONG IN HOLINESS

A Set-Apart Life Pleases God

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

- Read *1 Thessalonians 4:1-12*, paying close attention to Paul's emphasis on living a life that is pleasing to God.
 - Reread and note the specific instructions on how to live a holy, different life.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear the phrase “**a life that pleases God,**” what examples come to mind—people, habits, attitudes, or personal experiences?

2. Paul encourages the believers to ‘do’ what in verses 1 and 2? The biblical term for this is _____ (1 Thess. 4:3, 5:23, Hebrews 10:14). What does this steady growth look like in the Christian life? In your life?

3. Living set-apart lives is no more evident or different from the worldly culture than in the area of sexual purity (vv. 3-8). Why is this area singled out? How could sexual impurity “wrong a brother” (4:6)?

4. There is a clear contrast Paul makes between holiness and passionate lust “*like the Gentiles who do not know God*” (4:5). How does knowing God reshape our desires, habits, passions, and choices? How do you grow in knowing God?

5. The word complacency is never part of Paul's vocabulary, nor should it be in ours. How do verses 9 and 10 support this idea? What steps can we take to show "*more and more*" sacrificial love for each other?

6. In shaping Christian community, Paul provides some practical advice that can be paraphrased as "*Don't make a scene of yourself, focus on your own responsibilities, and work hard*" (4:11-12). How does this advice help us **stand strong** in hope and faith? Explain how they impact our maturity and mission.

7. Which of these instructions (4:1-12) is the most challenging for you? What will you do to start putting it into practice? What prayer and support do you need?

- Closing Prayer based on **1 Thess. 4:1** (use us/our/we in group) – Lord, help me walk in a manner that pleases you. Make me holy in body and spirit, increase my love for others, and enable me to live each day faithfully so that others come to know you as I stand strong and set apart for your good work. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 5 – STAND STRONG IN HOPE

Believers Live with Confidence in Christ's Return

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

- Read *1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11*, paying close attention to Paul's teachings about grief, hope, and Jesus' return.
 - Reread and note each example of contrast: darkness versus light, and so on.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you think about “**the future**,” what emotions come to mind—fear, hope, uncertainty, curiosity, anticipation, joy, or something else? Explain.

2. Why were the Thessalonian believers grieving as if they were “*without hope*” (4:13)? How does Paul correct their misunderstanding?

3. What essential truths does Paul use to anchor their hope (4:14-18)? Which one encourages you the most today? Can you share that hope with others?

4. Paul writes that Jesus will return “*with a _____ of command, the voice of an _____, and the sound of the _____ of God*” (4:16). How does knowing this reshape the way we think about death, the future, our worship, salvation, or God? Despite our human limitations, what are your thoughts on this “scene” playing out?

5. In 5:1-8, Paul contrasts children of darkness with children of light. Why is this important for understanding and living out our identity in Christ? How do you practically “*stay awake*” and remain “*sober-minded*” spiritually? (1 Peter 5:8)

6. Praise the Lord for verses 9 and 10! Seriously, stop right now, wherever you are – alone or in a group – and thank the Lord for this truth. How does this statement of faith, hope, and glory help you **stand strong** each day?

7. Who in your life needs encouragement through the words of this passage (5:11)? How can you encourage someone with this hope? How can others motivate you with these promises and truths regarding the Lord’s return?

- Closing Prayer based on **1 Thess. 5:8** (use us/our in group) – Lord, let me live as a child of the Light. Clothe me with the faith, love, and hope of my salvation. Guard my heart, keep me alert, awake, and sober, as you help me stand strong each day in light of your return and eternity. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 6 – STAND STRONG IN PEACE

God's Church Practices Harmony

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

- Read *1 Thessalonians 5:12-28*, paying close attention to Paul's instructions for living at peace within the Body of Christ, the church community.
 - Reread and note all the commands that guide peaceful relationships or promote peace among brothers and sisters in the community.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear the phrase “**be at peace,**” what comes to mind? Do you see it as an invitation for oneself, inner peace, or a blessing of peaceful interactions with others? Does it suggest active or passive effort on your part to achieve peace?

2. What attitudes does Paul instruct believers to show toward those “*who labor among you*” (5:12-13)? How does honoring spiritual leadership connect to peace in a local church? How does 1 Peter 5:1-11 shed light on shared expectations of respect?

3. Paul acknowledges that there will be different, sometimes difficult, people in any church (5:14-15). How can we respond wisely and lovingly to them?

4. If we wake up each new day and commit to “*rejoice _____, pray _____, and give thanks in _____ circumstances*” (5:16-18), how might it impact our daily life? What obstacles prevent you from doing this?

5. How does “*testing everything; holding fast what is good, and abstaining from every form of evil*” (5:21-22) help maintain the peace and unity of a church? Who is responsible for holding fast and abstaining from evil?
6. What do Paul’s closing words (5:23-24) tell us about God’s faithfulness? How can this prayer help you **stand strong** and be at peace with others?
7. Which command in this passage is God inviting you to practice more intentionally this week? What can you do to promote peace in the Body?
- Closing Prayer based on **1 Thess. 5:23-24** (use us/our in group) – God of peace, sanctify me completely. Keep my spirit, soul, and body blameless at your return. You are faithful; You will surely do it. Help me stand strong in the fellowship of your people and help me be at peace with others. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 7 – STAND STRONG IN HARDSHIP

Endurance Will Be Rewarded

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

- Read *2 Thessalonians 1:1-12*, paying close attention to Paul's encouragement to a suffering and persecuted church.
 - Reread and note the references to trials, afflictions, and other descriptions of the situation in Thessalonica during this time.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear the word “**endurance**,” do you think of physical strength, mental grit, or spiritual persistence? Share a personal example of endurance.
2. In verse 3, Paul recognizes the Thessalonians’ growing faith and increasing love for one another. How can hardships produce this kind of growth?
3. A key theme in both letters is the attribute of “*steadfastness*” (1:4). Look up several definitions, synonyms, and descriptions, then explain it in your own words. What importance does James 1:3-4 assign to steadfastness?
4. God considers it “_____ *to repay with affliction those who afflict you*” (1:5-6). Essential to our interpretation is “who” repays affliction and “when” relief comes. Explain this passage with that essential understanding.

5. The imagery in verses 7-10 is vivid. What is most tragic about the judgment of those who do not know God? What is most hopeful for those who do know the Lord? How does this teaching enable us to **stand strong** in present hardships?

6. Paul prays that the Thessalonian believers might be made worthy of God's calling on their lives (1:11-12). What does that mean? For what purpose? How do you pray this over your life, your family, or other church members?

7. Hardship in life is expected. Hardship in Christian life is assured. How are trials and hardships refining your faith, deepening your love, or creating endurance in your journey? Share with someone and allow others to join with you in prayer.

- Closing Prayer based on **2 Thess. 1:11-12** (use us/our in group) – Lord, make me worthy of your calling. Fulfill every good resolve and work of faith in my life by your power so that Jesus may be glorified in me. Strengthen me to stand strong in the afflictions of a fallen world. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 8 – STAND STRONG IN TRUTH

The Answer to Deception is Truth

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

- Read *2 Thessalonians 2:1-17*, paying close attention to Paul's general summary of end-time (eschatology) expectations and how believers should respond.
 - Reread and note the primary characteristics of rebellion and lawlessness.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear the word “**truth**,” how do you define it? What are some synonyms, antonyms, and metaphors for truth?
2. The opening remarks of this passage (2:1-2) suggest the Thessalonians either had been, or could be, “*quickly shaken or alarmed*” in their faith. What causes believers to be shaken? In what ways have you ever been alarmed in your faith?
3. Paul is concerned that believers are being deceived about the “*man of lawlessness*” (2:3-10). How does this passage help us maintain clarity without fear or speculation? How does it help to know Paul was not writing to interpret prophecy, but to clarify, reassure, and comfort?
4. According to Paul, those without Christ will fall for wicked deception (2:10). Why? What does this look like today? How do we cultivate a love for truth?

5. How does John 14:6 help us understand 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14? What does Paul say believers will share after receiving the gospel? Describe your thoughts on knowing this promise.

6. “*So then, _____ and _____ to the _____*” (2:15). What does Paul mean by this in the context of this letter? What does that look like in the rhythms of your daily life? How can we support one another in this pursuit?

7. Paul’s closing to this passage implies that we **stand strong** through the love, comfort, hope, and grace of Jesus Christ. In which of these, or other ways the Lord provides, do you need to receive your strength today?

- Closing Prayer based on **2 Thess. 2:16-17** (use us/our/we in group) – Lord Jesus, comfort my heart and establish me in every good work and word. Help me stand strong in truth, discernment, and hope, as I hold fast to your Word and confidently live each day in your promises. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 9 – STAND STRONG IN PURPOSE

Everyday Faith Requires Intentionality

2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

- Read *2 Thessalonians 3:1-18*, paying close attention to Paul's instructions for living a purposeful and productive life.
 - Reread and note the specific commands Paul gives to prevent idleness and promote responsibility within the Christian community.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear the word “**busybody**,” what (NOT who) comes to mind? How do you perceive “busybodies” in terms of hard work and productive lives?
2. Notice the connection Paul makes between prayer, perseverance, and God’s faithfulness in verses 1-5. How do these work together to strengthen believers?
3. It can be difficult to hear, but Paul addresses it directly: avoid _____ (3:6-10). What is his main point to this instruction? What are modern forms of spiritual and practical idleness? When caring for others, how do we discern between genuine need and laziness?
4. What are some traits of a godly work ethic (3:7-9)? What are the connections between our work ethic and living on mission for the Lord? What does Scripture say about work (Prov. 19:15, Eccl. 9:10, Eph. 4:28, Col. 3:23-24)?

5. Paul writes, “*Do not grow weary in doing good*” (3:13). What causes weariness? What helps you most when you’ve grown weary? If you are tired now, read Isaiah 40:30-31 and ask someone to pray for your renewed strength.

6. Church discipline is in view for “busybodies” (3:11) and those living in willful disobedience (3:14-15) to God’s inspired teaching through his apostles. How can loving correction be intentional and help believers to **stand stronger**?

7. In his final remarks on this passage, Paul mentions the “*Lord of peace*” giving peace at all times (3:16). How does a peaceful life enable purpose-filled living?

- Closing Prayer based on **2 Thess. 3:15-16** (use us/our/we in group) – Lord, direct my heart to your love and steadfastness. Give me peace at all times, strengthen my work, help me stand strong in purpose, and protect me from every kind of idleness so that I might do all things as unto you. Amen.

Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

UNIT 10 – STAND STRONG BY GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

Benedictions: The Sending of God’s People

Thessalonians 3:11–13, 5:23–28; 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17, 3:16

- Read each of the selected benedictions from 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, paying close attention to Paul’s prayers and petitions for God’s continued blessings, guidance, and presence in the lives of the Thessalonian believers.
-

Sermon Notes / Passage Reflections

Questions

1. When you hear the word “**benediction**,” what comes to mind—a specific moment, a phrase or prayer, a person, or a non-spiritual meaning? Explain.
2. Who has been a spiritual encourager in your life, particularly as someone who has prayed over you? How did God use them?
3. What are some themes you notice in these benedictions in Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians? For example: Abounding love or God’s peace.
4. Paul prays for the Thessalonians to be kept _____ (1 Thess. 3:13, 5:23) at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. What does he mean by this?

5. One of the most encouraging promises in all of these letters is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, *“He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”* What is this in reference to? How did you need to be encouraged by this right now? Did you notice it is also primarily a proclamation of who God is? Explain.

6. How do these benedictions, and those prayed at the end of your regular weekly worship service, help you **stand strong** even when circumstances feel uncertain or unstable? Is there a particular benediction that is most helpful to you?

7. As we reach the end of our study, what key insights or reflections are you taking with you from these letters? How has your knowledge and love of God grown through this time? What steps have you taken in spiritual maturity?

- Closing Prayer based on **Benediction Scriptures** (use us/our in group) – Father God, establish my heart, sanctify me completely, give me peace at all times, comfort and strengthen me in every good work and word, and keep me blameless and holy until the coming of our Lord Jesus. Help me stand strong by your faithfulness, as you are able, and you will do it. Amen.

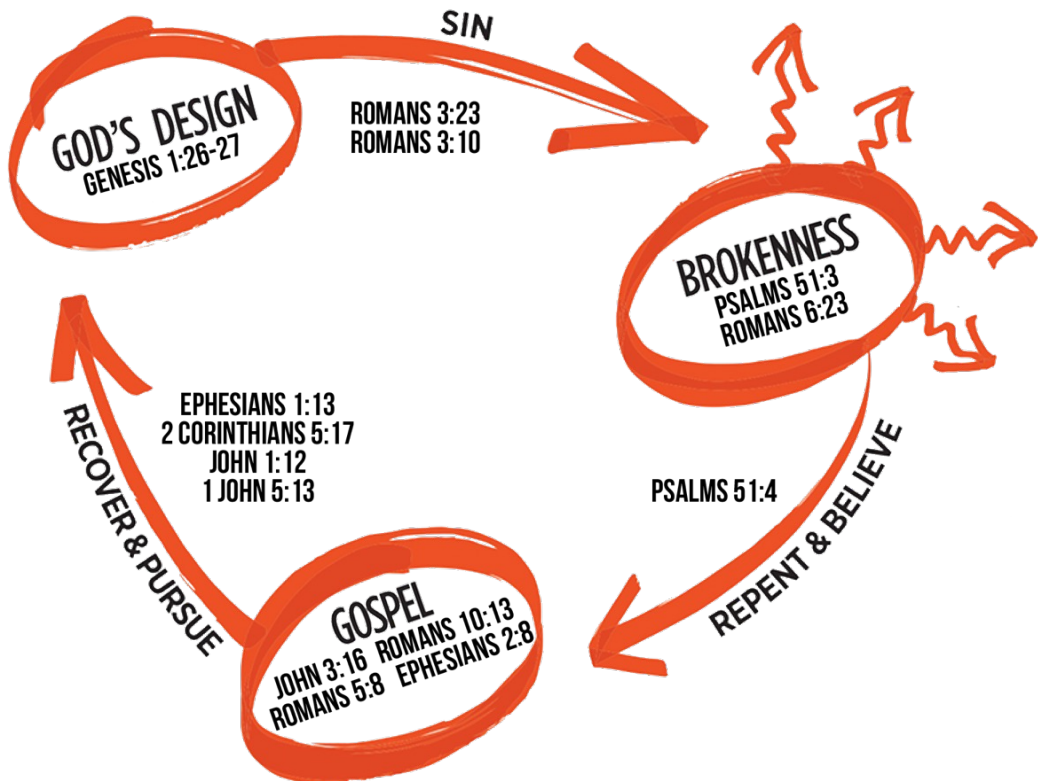
Discussion Notes / Prayer Journal

STAND STRONG IN THE GOSPEL

To stand strong in the Gospel (Unit 1: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10), we must continue to grow in our love and knowledge of the Gospel. The power, mystery, and fullness of this life-changing good news are never taken for granted, and we always remain ready to share it with those without hope.

If this is the first time you've heard the Gospel message of God's plan to redeem (deliver, save, reconcile) His creation to Himself through Jesus Christ, that's fantastic. We strongly encourage you to ask more questions and learn more about what the Bible says about receiving the Gospel as your own.

If you've received the Gospel and are unsure how to best share it, take a moment to review the Three Circles diagram. It offers a solid starting point to ensure you communicate the necessary elements of the Gospel. Be curious, ask questions, and reflect often on the most important message we will ever know.



THREE CIRCLES – A SIMPLE GOSPEL OUTLINE

- **God's Design:** God created the world—and us—with purpose, order, goodness, and wholeness. We were made to live in His design, in His presence, and in a relationship with Him under His loving rule.
- **Brokenness:** Instead of following God's design, we chose our own design, and that disobedience is called 'sin.' *Sin led to separation*, pain, and the brokenness we all see and feel in the world. We try to fix it ourselves with relationships, pleasure, money, careers, hobbies, addictions, and more, but our attempts never address the root issue.
- **The Gospel:** God's plan to send His Son, Jesus, as the only one capable of paying the penalty for sin and delivering us from brokenness. Jesus was born, lived, and died according to God's plan. And in victory over our disobedience, He was raised from the dead and made our salvation possible. By turning from sin (*repenting*, asking forgiveness) and trusting in Him (*believing* in Him), we are forgiven and restored to the relationship and presence He designed—partially now, but fully for eternity.
- **Recover & Pursue:** When we follow Jesus, He begins to heal our brokenness and empower us to pursue God's design again—growing in obedience, community, and mission.

WRITE OUT A PRAYER FOR SHARING THE GOSPEL



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