

Until He Returns

1 Thessalonians



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Study 1: A faith known everywhere	Page 3
Study 2: Motives for Ministry	Page 9
Study 3: Standing firm in the Lord (Faith)	Page 13
Study 4: How to live in order to please God (Love)	Page 17
Study 5: Death is not the end...(Hope)	Page 20
Study 6: God's will for you in Christ Jesus	Page 24

Background to the letter

The first letter to the Thessalonians was written by the Apostle Paul around the years 49–51 A.D. It was likely the first letter he ever wrote in the New Testament. It was written to a new Christian community in Thessalonica which he started during his second missionary journey.

Thessalonica still exists today but in Paul's day it was the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia and due to its significance it came to be known as the "mother of all Macedonia". It had a harbour and was on a busy Roman road called the *Egnatian Way* which connected Italy and Greece with Turkey. This allowed for a bustling city with many different kinds of people and ideas coming and going. It had a large population of anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 people. The city was committed to the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods, and as you can imagine all sorts of other beliefs and ideas, including those of Jews who lived there and had adopted the Greek way of life.



Timothy joined Paul and Silas in Lystra and then they travelled on from there to various places. Paul had a vision while in Galatia which told him to go to Macedonia. After being arrested for preaching the gospel in Philippi (Acts 16) they moved on to Thessalonica. Where, as you will see, they continued to face persecution and had to leave after a short stay. They feared their efforts may have been wasted, but after Timothy returned to check on the church in Thessalonica he learnt they were standing firm in their faith, but had a few issues. So Paul is writing to this relatively new church, encouraging them to persevere in the faith in the gospel, their love for one another, and their hope in the return of Jesus.

Study 1 - A faith known everywhere

Read Acts 17:1-10 which describes the history of how the church in Thessalonica was established.

1. Who were Paul's travelling companions? Before arriving in Thessalonica where did they come from? *Fill in your map.*

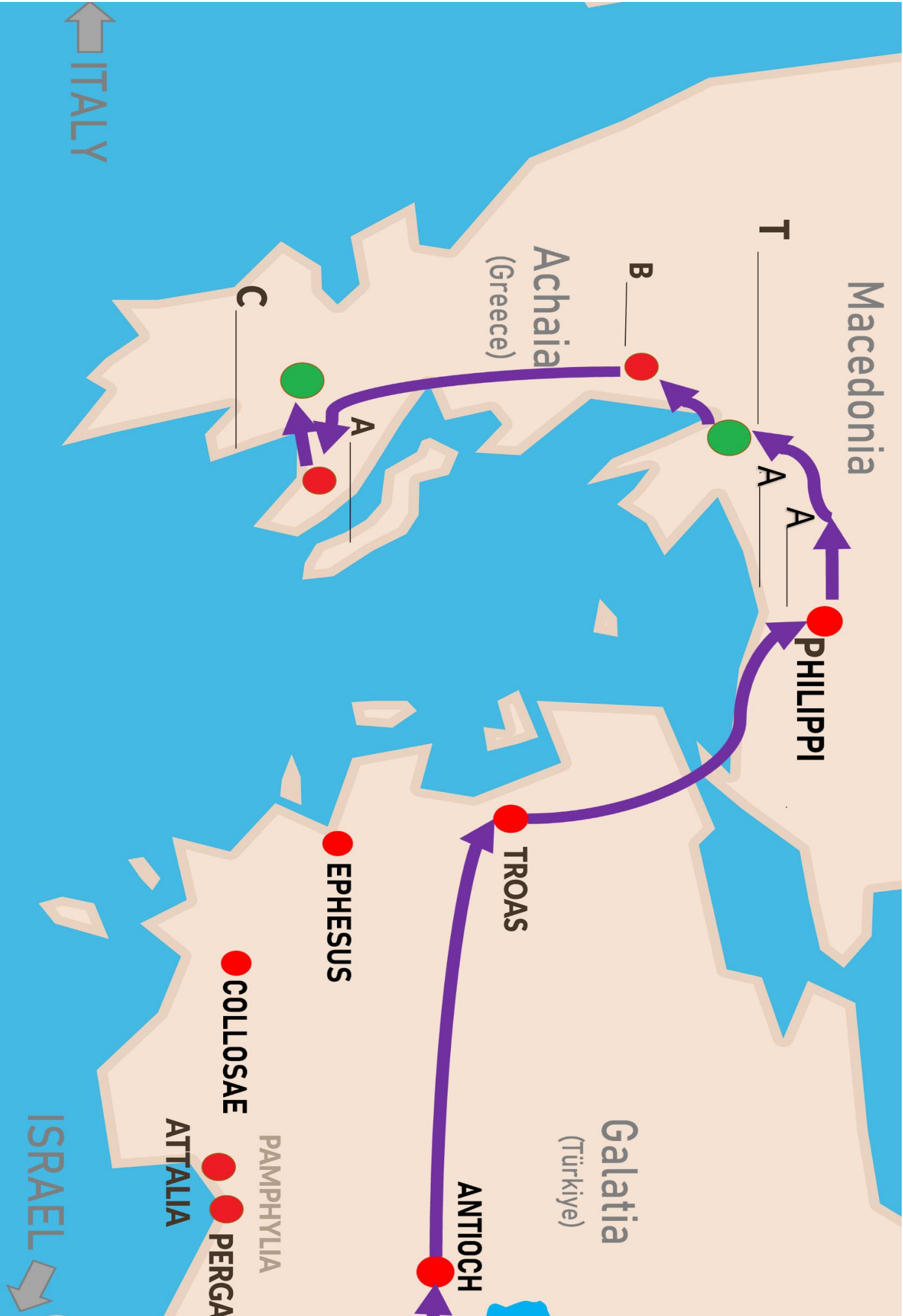
2. How long did Paul and his companions stay in Thessalonica? How was the gospel received by the Thessalonians?

3. Why did Paul and Silas leave Thessalonica? Where did they flee to? (Also see 17:10-15) *Fill in your map.*

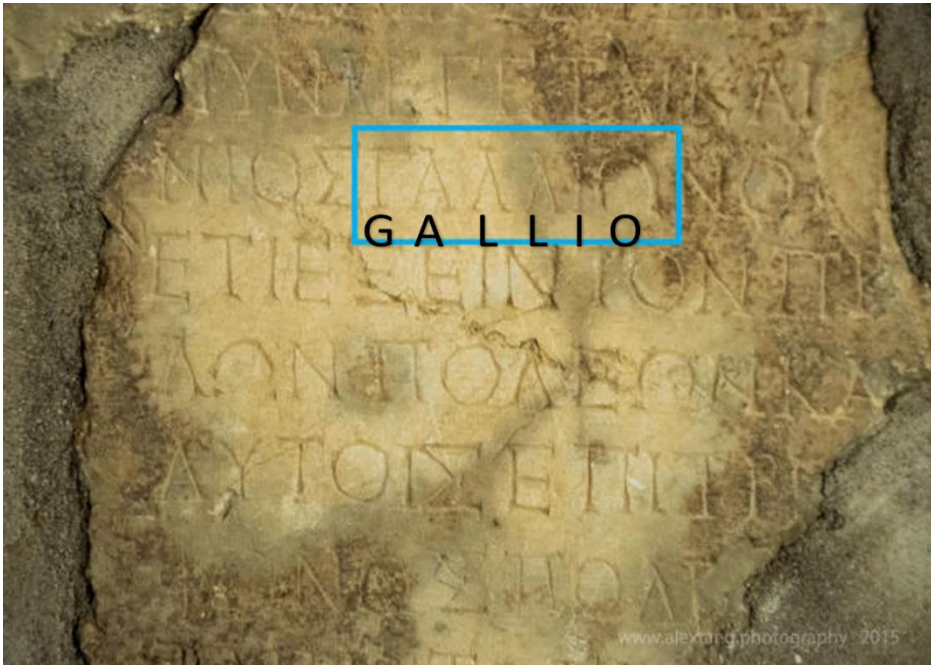
4. The angry Jews followed Paul all the way to Berea! What do you think these Jews would have thought and said on their way to Berea?

5. Paul was "escorted" where after Berea? *Fill in your map.*

6. Finally, where did Paul go after Athens? And who met him there? (Acts 18:1-5)



It is most likely that during Paul's 18-month stay in Corinth he wrote his letters to the Thessalonian church. Based on Archaeological evidence found in Delphi called *The Delphi Inscription* which confirms Gallio's proconsulship mentioned in Acts 18:12-17 Paul likely wrote his letters between 49-51 A.D.



Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

7. Does anything stand out to you given the knowledge you now have of the original context?

8. We learnt in Acts 17 that Paul preached the gospel in the Synagogue. How was God at work behind the scenes? How did the Thessalonians respond as a result, or what evidence does Paul give that their conversion was genuine?

9. Paul thanks God for these amazing results and summarises them in verse 3. What does each mean? (See also 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4)

Consult your map to see where the gospel spread due to the Thessalonians faith, love and hope (verses 7-9).

10. At the time of this letter, how do you think the Thessalonians were feeling after all they had been through? How would Paul's words have helped them?

What does this mean for us?

Looking back, what evidence is there for the genuineness of your conversion? If you have known each other long enough, share evidence you see in one another.

If you're not yet a Christian, how did you hear about Christianity, was it the teaching or the way Christian's behaved which appealed to you most?

11. Have you ever doubted the genuineness of your conversion? How does remembering God's work behind the scenes comfort and encourage you in your doubts or suffering in life?

12. Write a short letter to a new Christian, include these 3 elements:

Faith: Encourage them in their faith

Love: Remind them to be obedient in love as evidence of their faith

Hope: Inspire them to continue to endure hardships because of their hope in Jesus.

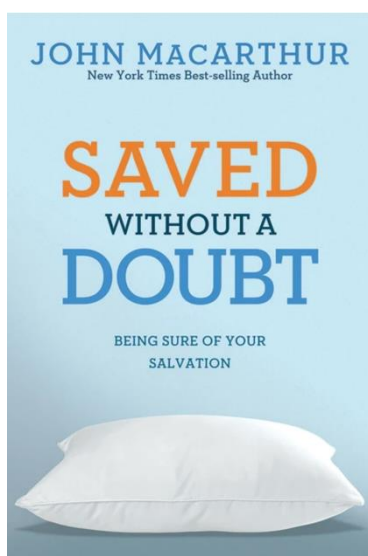
If you don't know a new Christian go to this link
<https://rb.gy/31w8s> and submit your letter so that it can be given to a new Christian who finishes our Explore series.



Or write a prayer of thanks to God for his work in bringing you to Jesus through the gospel and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mention your faith in the gospel, your love for others and your hope in Jesus' return.

Pray in response to God's Word

Recommended reading



Study 2 – Motives for Ministry

A pastor has a net worth of \$300,000,000; owns an airport, jets and multiple mansions. What might be their motivations for being a pastor? What other unhelpful motivations can those in church leadership have?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

1. Remember back to last week's study and the short amount of time Paul and Silas spent in Thessalonica and the opposition they faced, consider the things their enemies were thinking and saying about them. Then answer, why do you think Paul had to defend his ministry to the Thessalonians?

2. How and why does Paul defend the gospel message the Thessalonians accepted?

3. Make a list of all the positive things Paul did and said and a list of all the negative things he avoided in his ministry.

Verse #	Positive things Paul did and said	Verse #	Negative things he avoided

4. What does it mean in verse 8 that Paul and his companions shared not only the gospel but their lives as well?

5. Given all the troubles, slander and persecution Paul received why did he continue in his ministry? What do you think his motivations were for doing so?

What does this mean for us?

6. Do we use flattery when sharing the gospel, avoiding words like 'sin' or 'wrath' (verse 16), 'hell', or 'judgement'? Are we inclined to speak of the blessings of the good news without mentioning the bad news first? Do you think the "flirt to convert" method of evangelism comes from impure motives? Does it make you uncomfortable when people use the word hell when preaching in public? Why or why not?

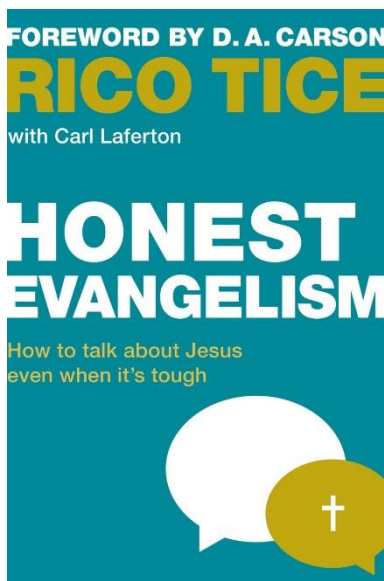
7. What is and isn't our responsibility when sharing the gospel?

8. Are you someone who tends to love through words or actions when it comes to evangelism/ministry? What are the strengths and weaknesses to these approaches and what do we learn from Paul about the ideal model of evangelism/ministry?

Bonus question: Some churches use what is called a “seeker-sensitive” church model. This model of church prioritises reaching as many non-Christians as possible by making church a comfortable and non-threatening experience. Often going to great lengths to reach the lost; this can mean using theatrics, or entertainment, with high tech lighting, sound and visuals to draw people in. Due to trying to make church comfortable “divisive” doctrines or words like repentance or sin can be avoided as to keep the non-Christians at church. Many “seeker-sensitive” churches are “megachurches” with large congregations and get hundreds of newcomers through the door each month. What is Biblical and admirable about this church model? What might be the dangers of doing church this way?

Pray in response to God’s Word

Recommended reading



Study 3 - Standing firm in the Lord (Faith)

1. "The Christian life is hard", "The Christian life is easy" – Discuss which resonates with you and why?

Read Acts 17:1-10

While reading note down the key people, places, conflict, and resolution in the narrative.

2. Retell the story using only 20 words. Feel free to work in smaller groups.

OR retell the story using emoji's on your phone.

OR draw a comic book storyboard retelling the story in 4 sections.

V1-3	V4
V5-9	V10

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

3. Let's start with the elephant in the room...

What does it mean that Satan blocked Paul's way in verse 18? Hint: another name for Satan is the Anti-Christ. Can you think of any Anti-Christ type people that Paul encountered on his journey? What does this teach us about Satan's desires and how he works to oppose the church and the gospel?

4. In comparison to Satan, how does Paul feel about the Thessalonians?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

5. What does Paul mean when he speaks of the Thessalonians being "destined" for trials (verse 3)? (See Matthew 5:10-12, John 15:18-21) How can he be confident that he would be "persecuted"? (See Acts 9:15-17)

6. As we know, Paul could not visit the church himself despite his intense longing to do so (1 Thessalonians 2:17). Paul was afraid that Satan may have tempted the Thessalonians away from their faith and into sinful living (1 Thessalonians 3:5). What did he send Timothy to do? What did Timothy report back to Paul?

7. How does Paul respond to this news about the Thessalonians? What excites him most?

8. What are the 3 things Paul prays for the Thessalonians verses 11-13?

What does this mean for us?

9. How do you feel about the idea that God destines his people for trials? What comfort can you take from what we have just read?

10. How can we remain strong in our faith?

11. What does it mean to be "blameless"? Does God want us to be perfect?

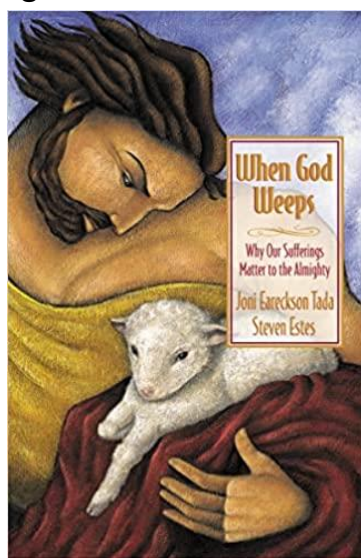
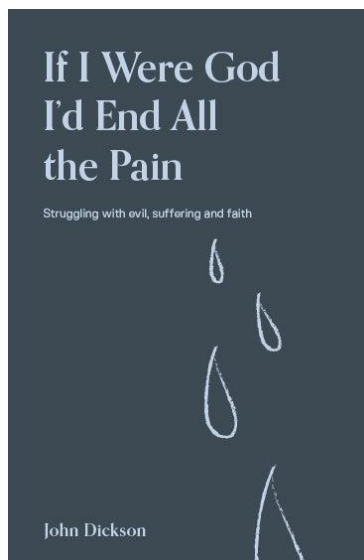
Pray in response to God's Word

Satan continues to oppose the spread of the gospel today, just as he has always done. We know he didn't succeed in the case of the Thessalonians and ultimately, he won't succeed, as we read in Revelation. That being said, Paul still prayed for the gospel to go forward.

Pray now for the spread of the gospel to unknown peoples who are hard to reach and for those who face real, life-threatening persecution.

Pray as you feel led

Recommended reading



Study 4 - How to live in order to please God (Love)

1. It has been said that all people struggle with sinful desires towards “gold, girls or glitter” A.K.A “money, sex and pride”. Discuss.

2. Does the church talk about each of these issues equally?

Read 1 Thessalonian 4:1-12

3. Paul had already instructed the new Christians in Thessalonica how they were to live a life that is acceptable in God’s sight (verse 1). What does he now urge them to do?

4. It is God’s will that the Thessalonians be sanctified (verse 3). What does the word sanctified mean? How does Paul describe this in practice?

5. Is Paul saying that it’s wrong to commit sexually immoral acts with Christians but ok to do so with non-Christians? What is the result of disregarding this command?

6. Why is it significant that Paul would end these instructions by mentioning the Holy Spirit? *Hint*: what does the “Holy” Spirit do in a Christian’s life?

7. In what ways can Christians win the respect of outsiders/non-Christians? (verses 10-12) What would be the point of winning the respect of outsiders?

What does this mean for us?

8. What is the difference between the believer and unbeliever’s approach to sex?

9. We live in such a sexualised world that for many Christians it may feel impossible to overcome sexual temptation. What tools has God given the Christian that they might have self-control over their sexually immoral desires?

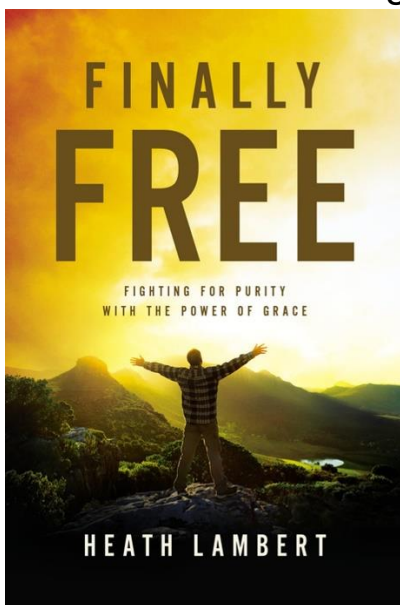
10. What are your ambitions in life - your dreams, your greatest desires? Does money or pride drive them? How does this exhortation to live a quiet life challenge your way of thinking about success?

11. The Bible teaches us here that we should desire others to look to us, not for prideful reasons but for gospel opportunities. Are your motivations in work and life consistent with this?

12. Do you consider Trinity Church Adelaide to be your family (literally your brothers and sisters)? If so, do you love them? How can you live this out more and more?

Pray in response to God's Word

Recommended reading:



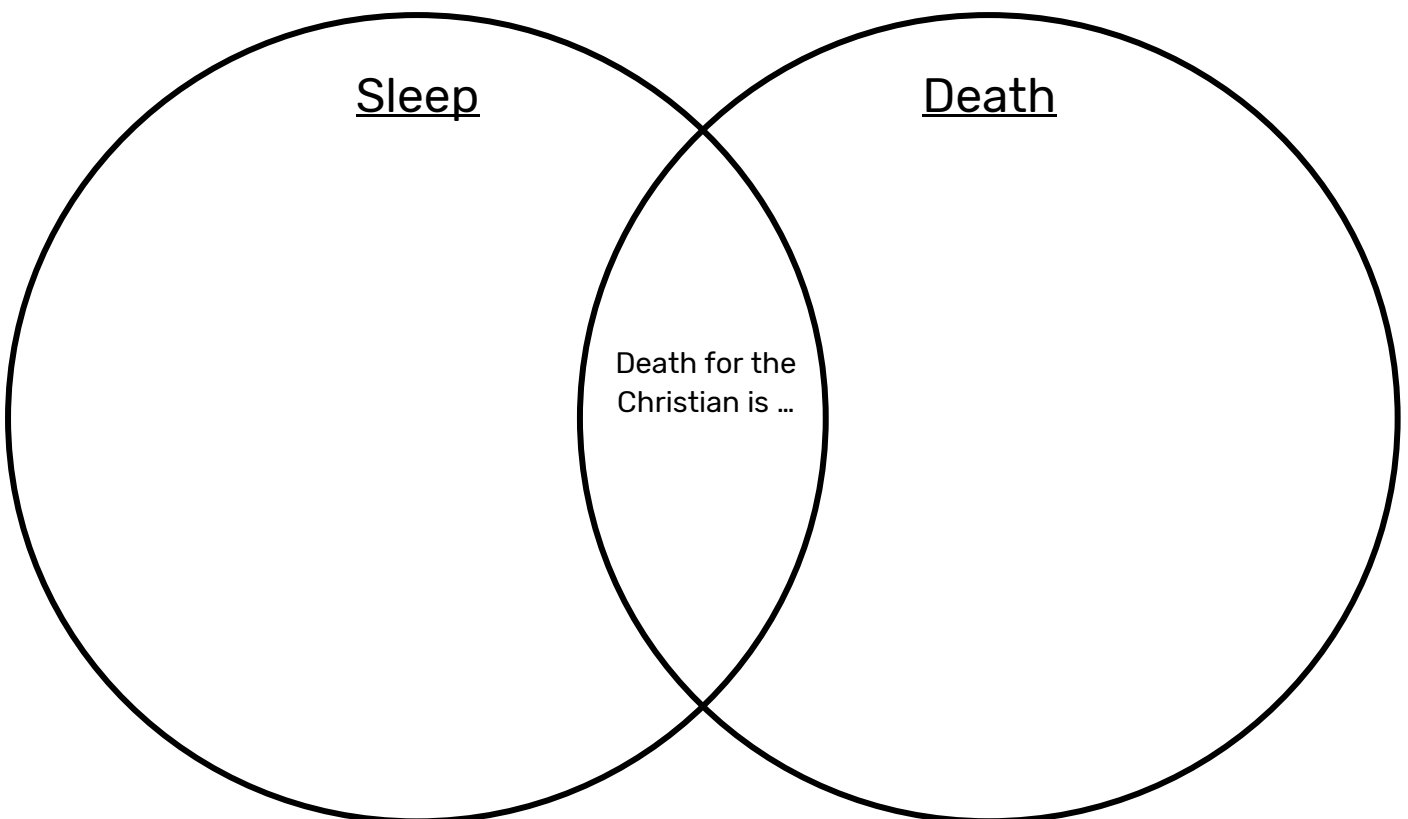
Study 5 - Death is not the end... (Hope)

1. Did you know that approximately 150,000 people die each day? How come "Australians don't like to talk about death."? Discuss.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2. Why does Paul write this section?

3. It can be a little confusing but when Paul speaks of those who "sleep in death" he is using sleep as a metaphor (verse 13), just as Jesus did. Describe attributes of death in one circle and sleep in another and try to work out what one attribute Paul is borrowing from sleep and applying to death.



4. When we study 2 Thessalonians later in the year we will look in more detail of the events that precede Jesus return. But for now, make a flow chart of the events Paul lists in verses 14-17.

5. What example does Paul give to instill confidence in the Thessalonians that they will rise again? Do you think they found this information comforting as they grieved the loss of their fellow brothers and sisters?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-12

6. It is often said that the coming of Jesus will be like a thief in the night. What does this mean? It may be surprising that this doesn't apply to believers! Why not?

What does this mean for us?

7. Often Christians fight over matters to do with the return of Christ. Do you still find it confusing? What can you be certain about? How can the return of Christ and the resurrection be a source of encouragement and unity instead of division (verse 18)?

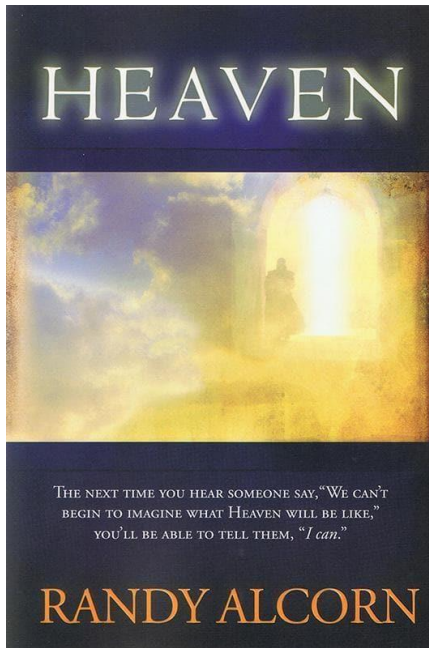
8. Remembering that we have a certain “hope” (verse 13) that those who died in Christ will rise again, are there any brothers or sisters you look forward to meeting in the air when Jesus returns? Share, only if you feel comfortable to do so, why you are excited to see them?

9. When you die, do you want people to grieve or celebrate or both?

10. A popular Christian book and movie series called “Left Behind” promoted the idea that some people who think they are Christian will be left behind when Jesus returns. How does this passage comfort you and challenge this idea that you might be left behind when Jesus returns?

Pray in response to God's Word

Recommended reading:



Study 6 - God's will for you in Christ Jesus

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

1. In verses 12-13 what are the responsibilities of church leaders towards those they lead?

2. What are the responsibilities of those being lead?

3. What does it mean to be idle? Why do idle people need to be warned?

4. In verse 15 Paul tells the Thessalonians that if someone mistreats them they should not mistreat them in return. Why? (see Romans 12:17-21)

5. Did Jesus pray and rejoice constantly? What does Paul mean when he commands that the Thessalonians rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances?

6. What does Paul tell the Thessalonians to do when they hear prophecy (words spoken from God through people)? What relationship does this have to quenching the Holy Spirit's work?

What does this mean for us?

7. Do you hold your leaders at church in high regard? Where would you be without them? The pastors at Trinity Church Adelaide work hard to care for you (although they won't tell you that, thankfully verse 12 does!). Brainstorm ways you can love them.

8. In what situations do you find it hard to be patient, and instead of handing the situation over to God in prayer you instead pay back wrong for wrong? What promise of God is important to remember concerning those who harm you?

9. Can you think of anyone in your growth group or church who needs help, who may be weak or disheartened? What can you and your growth group do to show them love at this time?

10. Anton Gue, comes to you and shares with you a “message he heard from God”. Regardless of whether or not you believe that the gift of prophecy is still active in the church today, what is this passage exhorting you to do (verses 20-22)? How would you “test” his message?

Pray in response to God’s Word

Recommended reading:

