

Walking With the Father Through 2 Thessalonians

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through this letter.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they must have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

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Paul wrote this follow-up letter to the believers in Thessalonica just a few months after he wrote his first letter to them and while he was still in Corinth. This is the second letter Paul wrote that we have in the New Testament. For more information, see the introduction to 1 Thessalonians.



New Testament World

As you spend time in this letter, please take the time to talk with our Father about what He's showing you so you're not just gathering information. As you pray, you can use the space on each page to journal your thoughts or write Him a note.

Walking With the Father Through 2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians 1:1-2

“ . . . from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul's greeting in this letter is identical to the greeting in his first letter to the Thessalonians, except for the addition of the words we're looking at today. So why do you think he added them to his greeting? One possibility came to me as I was sitting here at Starbucks writing.

The commentators in my NIV translation introduced this letter by saying that many of the issues in the two letters are the same, but the tone in the second letter is much stronger and sterner because his listeners had not taken his words seriously and changed how they were living.

So I wonder if Paul added these extra words in his greeting to bring in the big guns, so to speak, to emphasize his strong words in this letter? That what he was saying wasn't just his own ideas, but that the commands were really from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ?

Have you ever thought about how you respond to the commands in the Scriptures, especially in the apostles' letters? Do you take them as seriously as those that came from Jesus directly? And do we really take Jesus' commands seriously? (For example, "Don't worry about tomorrow for today has enough troubles of its own" from Matthew 6:34?)

As we've been looking at Paul's letters, I've been amazed at the daily commands we've been given and how our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ really do want to have a part in how we live—at work, at home, at church, with other believers, with those who aren't believers (yet), in our thoughts, and in our actions. They are really serious about this. Are you?



If you've ever wondered about the difference between a disciple and an apostle, here's a quick difference:

Disciple: A learner, follower, and imitator. Disciples were common in Jesus' day.

Apostle: The word means "sent ones." Peter states the requirements for an apostle in Acts 1:21-22. Apostles started churches and wrote the documents (letters) that became the foundation of our faith. They were the earthly representatives for Jesus Christ.

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2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

“Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.”

You might be wondering why we’re concentrating on only these two verses. Good question! It’s because when I read the whole section I was struck by this verse and *overwhelmed* by verses 5-10. Since I didn’t want to miss anything God has for us, we’ll be spending three days in this section.

What I noticed in today’s verse is the response of the Thessalonians to persecutions and trials. I know how I react to adversities, and I see how most people around me react. But Paul was commending the Thessalonians on their responses, which I want to be my responses: perseverance and faith.

Perseverance: Staying under the pressure; not running away physically, emotionally, or spiritually; seeing something through to the end; not being like a wimp or a child who gives up easily when conflict starts.

Faith: Choosing to believe that God is involved in the process, that He’s in control (it would be so much worse if He weren’t involved!), that He is powerful enough to bring good out of the horrible situations. This is what He did at the cross, and He doesn’t change.

So the next time that we feel persecuted or experience a trial (today?), let’s choose to stay under the pressure and let those around us see our perseverance and faith; we’ll then be giving God room to work in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Remember, it takes power to be able to live this way, and resurrection power is living in you through the Holy Spirit. If Jesus could do it, you can too since He’s living in you. But stepping out in faith has to come before we experience the power. Otherwise, we’d be walking by sight instead of faith.

Ready to try? What’s your first step?

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2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

“God is just”

Have you ever wondered what will happen when Jesus Christ comes back to earth, or what will happen to those people who do really bad things and never seem to feel badly about doing them or even have any repercussions from their actions? I know I've read this letter before, but this section exploded in my mind as I read it. So let's look at what Paul promised the Thessalonians *will* happen:

- God will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. (v. 6)
- God will give relief to you who are troubled. (v. 7)
- This relief will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. (v. 7)
- He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (v. 8)
- They will be punished with everlasting destruction. (v. 9)
- They will be shut out from the presence of His power. (v. 9)
- This will happen on the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people (us) and to be marveled at among all those who believe. (v. 10)

So God isn't a wimp, and He won't have patience forever—an end is in sight. This is what the Thessalonians were counting on during their persecutions and trials—God's justice.

What kind of a situation are you in now? Are you suffering for the Kingdom of God or just for something stupid you don't want to own up to?

What kind of a difference does it make to you in this situation that God is just and that Jesus is coming back to make all things right? If this is true (and it is), what do you think you should do next?

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2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

“ . . . you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God . . . we constantly pray for you that our God may count you worthy of his calling . . . ”

We probably all know that when we give in and let Jesus Christ be our Savior we get to go to heaven and be with Him when we die. But these phrases—*counted worthy of his calling*—give us a different slant, don't they? It seems that there is more to living now than just sliding into heaven. It seems that how we live *now* will make a difference *then*.

Have you ever considered that God has an opinion of how we're living our lives now? I know we all have our own opinions, and we're often concerned about the opinions of others; in fact, we may change jobs, homes, activities, and even spouses just to try to earn someone else's good opinion.

But do we care about God's opinion of us? While we are flaky as to what pleases us from day to day, God is immutable—what pleases Him one day will please Him the next. Shouldn't His opinion of us be what concerns us most because of who He is and what He's done for us? Shouldn't His standards be our standards?

Jesus Christ didn't save us from our sins so we could continue living as we want to or as we had been living. He saved us so we could have a brand new type of life—one where He's in charge, where He calls the shots, where He sets the standards because He's earned the right. This life is one in which He is Lord, the one in charge and who has the right to call the shots.

A year or so ago I was reading John Eldridge's book *Wild at Heart*, and in one of the chapters he suggests that we ask God about His opinion of us. You know, I still haven't done that exercise, and I'm not sure why. But I think it's time. Want to join me?



As a follow-up, I did ask God what He thought of me, and He told me I was His daughter. What a relief—I had been expecting something negative. What a sense of love and belonging that overcame me and has stayed with me. Why was I hesitant to ask? Are you hesitant or afraid? Go for it!

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2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.”

Remember the days when we looked at God's power and realized it was greater than anything we could imagine here on earth? Well, here's another example of His awesome power: with just the breath of His mouth and His coming, Jesus will overthrow the lawless one (whoever that is). Let's look at *what* Jesus will overthrow:

- Rebellion
- The “man” who will be doomed to destruction
- The work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders
- Every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing
- Those who have delighted in wickedness

What a contrast! God's powerful breath on one hand and the destruction of everything evil on the other. But remember that what we see in this section is the end of all things. What happens between now and when Jesus Christ comes back sounds pretty horrible, and I know that I'm not looking forward to living through such a time. So I'm hoping Paul will give us some encouragement throughout the rest of this letter as to how we should live during these end times.

Since I'm basically a coward and have a low threshold for pain, one of my prayers is that I would be ready for whatever comes my way. I believe that God will do His part to strengthen me; my part is to walk by faith in Him and depend on His grace.

He strengthens as we walk with Him and depend on Him. He's doing His part, but are you doing yours? Are you walking by faith or demanding to understand what's going on? Are you depending on His grace or relying on yourself? Walking and depending today and leaving tomorrow to Him—a challenging way to live, isn't it?

How's your walk? How's your dependence?

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2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

“So then, my brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”

Have you ever thought of what it was like for the first century Christians not to have the whole Bible as we do? If they were Jewish, they did have the Old Testament, but after they began to know Jesus, they had to learn to look at their familiar Scriptures through a whole new perspective. If they were Gentiles, they had only the spoken words of Paul and then eventually a letter here or there. It took years for the Gospels and Acts to be written— as well as the letters of Paul, Peter, and John—and then be spread around to the churches. No wonder Paul challenged the Thessalonians to *stand firm* and *hold to*. We’re challenged by the same words, but we have such a wealth of material to help us remember.

But they also had changed lives, and the “so then” that begins our verse is at the conclusion of what they had. Let’s look at their beginnings, because I think they’re similar to ours:

- They were brothers (and sisters) loved by the Lord.
- From the beginning God chose them to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
- God called them to this through what Paul had presented to them (the gospel).
- They were called so they might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the truth is that we already have what God has done and will do; what about the “so then” that we’re suppose to do in the meantime? Paul says we’re to believe this truth and stand on it as solid rock rather than sifting sand.

Doesn’t it seem like your foundation is sifting sand when you have to get the test results from the doctor, a close friend dies (or just even moves away), or your kids leave the house in a huff? It really isn’t though. We do stand on solid rock. And if we’ll look to the Father and the Son, Paul says that They’ll encourage our hearts and strengthen us in every good deed and word.

Do you need encouragement, hope, or strength? Maybe today—right now—is the time to review where you’ve come from and then choose to stand firm and hold to the teachings God has given you so you’ll be the person you want to be. Ready to start?

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2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

“May the Lord direct your heart into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.”

One of the questions I’ve been mentally tossing around this year has been “Who am I talking to when I pray and why? Do I talk to the Father or to the Son?” I know some folks pray to the Holy Spirit, but I don’t because in John’s Gospel Jesus says the Spirit doesn’t bring glory to Himself but to the Son who brings glory to the Father (John 16). So if the Spirit is pointing to the Son, I should be looking that way too.

Anyway, as I was reading this section, I was struck by Paul asking (praying) the Lord Jesus Christ to direct our hearts “into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.” So sometimes Paul did talk to (pray to) Jesus Christ rather than to God the Father. More importantly, however, I noticed that Paul was referring to our hearts in this verse, not to our behaviors or our performance.

I was struck by Paul saying that he wanted our hearts to know God’s love. Have you ever found God’s love to be confusing? I have. For example: we have to be saved to go to heaven, we have to die to ourselves to live, the first shall be last and the last first, the proud will be humbled, we are to give a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15), and we are to make requests and petitions to God with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6).

But God’s love saves us, gives us life, bestows honor on us, raises us up, and lifts us above our circumstances. As Paul said in yesterday’s devotion, by God’s grace we have eternal encouragement and good hope so our hearts will be encouraged, and we will be strengthened in every good deed and work. (vv. 16-17)

Paul also wants our hearts to know Christ’s perseverance. I’ve never thought of that character quality in Jesus while He was here on earth, but it certainly does make sense. Thank goodness He persevered and didn’t give up when the going got hard! This quality of Christ’s perseverance is something I’m going to be thinking about for a while.

What are you going to be thinking about today? How’s your heart? Does it know God’s love and Christ’s perseverance? Do love and perseverance describe you as God’s son or daughter? If not, what changes can you start making today?

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2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

“For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’”

Commentators tell us that Paul warns the Thessalonians against idleness because they were thinking Christ could come back any minute, and so had the mindset, “Why work?” To set their thinking straight, Paul told them (and us) in this letter of some of the events that must happen before His return, so in essence he’s saying, “Get back to work!”

But I live in an affluent area where many (most) women don’t work, or at least don’t work fulltime at a career. This is a transient business area where husbands are at a plant or a branch office for a couple of years and then are transferred somewhere else. Wives have a hard time settling in because they know they’ll be leaving soon. Where cotton used to be king in the mid-1800s, tennis is running a close second for many. At night the restaurants’ parking lots are full. Convenience foods abound in grocery stores. The men work horrendous hours and usually travel during the week.

What is a Christian woman to do in this type of environment, especially if she wants to reach out to her peers? How does Paul’s example of working while he was ministering among the Thessalonians help her? How should husbands help their wives in this pull between Paul’s command to work and a wife financially not needing to work? How should wives help their husbands who seem to go to the extreme of working all the time?

For once I’m not going to suggest an answer because everyone’s situation is different. We all have to struggle with the truth of this section and listen to the Lord as He speaks to our hearts. But I will share how Christ is leading me at this stage of my life. After working fulltime for many years, I now work one day a week and have a part-time business. This change has helped me see God provide through my husband instead of thinking that I had to help out financially. I spend much of my time now with women in ministry situations, which is becoming an everyday lifestyle. But could I have handled this amount of free time earlier in my life? No! The discipline and accountability of working fulltime molded my character.

Wives, how are you spending your time? Husbands, how are you encouraging your wives to spend their time—and what about your own free time? Students? Singles? Retirees? Do you really deserve to eat? And when you’re not working at a job, are you involved with others the way Paul was when he wasn’t working? What changes do you need to make?

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2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.”

I remember thinking as I started writing in 1 Thessalonians that I couldn't wait to get to 1 Timothy. But now I'm sad to be leaving these two letters, and I'm looking forward to getting to know these dear believers in heaven. I'm still amazed at the high standard Paul called them to since they only had a small amount of personal teaching by Paul and a few of his letters. We have the whole Bible and years of perspective. So I guess it's not how much truth you have available to you but what you *do* with it.

But on to this section: peace. What images does that word conjure up in your mind? I first dream of Arabs and Jews getting along, and then I think of harmony between parents and children, daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law, rival gang members, husbands and wives, and the diverse group of family and friends who will be sitting down at our Thanksgiving table later on today.

Peace (as I envision these types of relationships) doesn't just mean the absence of conflict, it also includes the freedom that comes from actually getting along with each other; enjoying each other; having joy bubble up like laughter when we're with each other; reaching out to each other; caring for each other; and eliminating pride, hiding, and selfishness because we no longer need to concentrate on ourselves. How can this quality of relationship happen? The Lord of peace Himself makes available to us His peace at all times and in every way if I know Him and do things His way.

Do you know the Lord of peace? You may already be a Christian, but do you know the Lord who is peace and who provides peace? Is your conflict with Him over, finished, resolved? Because peace with Him is where true peace begins.

Perhaps you've been a Christian for a while but still feel agitation in the pit of your stomach in an area of your life; perhaps the Lord of peace is calling you to Himself in a new and deeper way.

How will you respond? What changes are you longing for today?
