

# Study 12: Hope in Work--Participant Guide

## Introduction

Throughout Paul's ministry he needed brothers and fellow ministers to assist in spreading the Gospel, but despite serious hardships, he never depended on others for his living. In fact at times he took on a heavy workload of manual labor in addition to his ministry in order to avoid being a burden to any fellow Christian. Paul desired for these traits to be a model for new converts to imitate.

Through our work we earn a living to provide for ourselves and our family and to also give generously to the Church and those who are truly needy. In this lesson, we learn that Paul wants us to discern those who are truly needy from those who are idle. The distinction is important to make. God desires each of us to earn our keep and to not be a burden on others. We learn that being God's disciple will bring us in contact with many people who could potentially become a burden on us and our message. We are taught not to be discouraged or taken advantage of. Ultimately Paul leaves us with a desire that God be with us and that he grant us His peace and His mercy at all times and in all places. Armed with these tools and a faith built on a firm foundation, the Thessalonians had everything they needed to successfully spread God's Word and minister to the new converts in their community. And we have that promise as well.

## Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-12

*3 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, <sup>2</sup> and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. <sup>3</sup> But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. <sup>4</sup> And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. <sup>5</sup> May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup> It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.*

## Discussion

1. Paul asks that the Thessalonians pray for Paul and his ministry so that the word of the Lord may speed ahead, spread, and be honored. Paul was focused on his mission which

was to spread the Word of God and the Gospel as far as it could possibly go. He would have been amazed to see after his death how it spread throughout the Roman Empire and ultimately around the world. **Can you relate to Paul's mission? Have we seen the Gospel spreading in a dynamic and life-altering way during our lifetime? Perhaps you have a similar story in your work or your community where you can relate? What does it feel like to heed God's call and see it bear fruit?**

2. But Paul anticipates that he will encounter resistance from wicked and evil men. **What kind of people do you think Paul was referring to here? What kind of resistance do we encounter in promoting God's Word and enacting God's will today in our society? Based on Paul's message here should we persist in executing God's will or cower in the face of this resistance? What promise does Paul provide here about the resistance we will face?**

Paul warns us about others we might encounter in our walk who do not conform to the pattern of living and teaching that Paul provided to the Thessalonians. In verses 6-12 he singles out those people who are idle. These are people who purposely choose not to work and therefore rely on others for their basic necessities. Furthermore some of these individuals act like busybodies engaging in the business of others, thereby meddling in others affairs, but not contributing anything distinct or valuable to society and earn their own living.

3. **Can you relate to the people Paul singles out in verses 6-12? Have you at times fallen into idleness and become a burden on others? If so, how did you realize that this behavior was not helpful and get away from that behavior? Are there areas in your life right now where you are idle and depending on others to do things that you should be doing yourself? Conversely, have you enabled others who were idle? How did it feel to be trapped in this situation and how did you respond when you realized it was not healthy?**
4. **Do you think this instruction in verse 6 conflicts with Jesus' instruction to care for the poor? Why or why not?**
5. **Why do you think that God cares so much about work, if we are capable of working? Why does He want us to avoid being idle if we are able to work? What impact could these people have on Paul's mission or the mission of faithful Thessalonian ministers and missionaries in Thessalonica?**
6. **Have you ever had to withdraw from someone who was manipulating you or taking advantage of you? What happened when you withdrew your support from them? Why do you think that Paul wants us to withdraw our support from those people here?**

## Read 2 Thessalonians 3:13-18

*<sup>13</sup> As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. <sup>14</sup> If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*

*<sup>16</sup> Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.*

*<sup>17</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*

## Discussion

Paul begins his benediction to the Thessalonians by telling them to not grow weary in doing good. Few things are more wearying than seeing others take advantage of Christian generosity, so Paul is offering encouragement to Christ's followers to persevere in their mission. He is encouraging them to not be distracted or discouraged from spreading the Gospel to those in their community who can benefit greatly from it.

In verse 14, Paul identifies a third group to be aware of and to withdraw from and these are people who have heard Paul's instructions, but refuse to obey it. This group is different than the previous two groups in that they are not actively resisting the spread of the Gospel, nor are they necessarily idle, but they are not obeying Paul's instructions, which could encourage other followers to disobey Paul's instructions as well.

7. In verses 15 Paul clarifies what he means by withdrawing from this group of people. Paul is very specific that we are not to treat these people as an enemy of the church, but instead warn them like they are a brother. In other words, Paul is teaching the Thessalonians to hold each other accountable. **Have you ever had to hold a fellow Christian accountable and if so what was your intention? How does the community of the church strengthen itself through holding others accountable and encouraging those who are struggling to keep the faith?**

Paul has spent most of this chapter warning the Thessalonians about three types of people and how to deal with them: 1) people who will actively resist their ministry to spread the Gospel, 2) people who are lazy and refuse to work thereby becoming a burden on Thessalonian believers, and 3) people who hear the good Word but refuse to obey.

Now at the end of the letter he implores the Lord to give the Thessalonians peace at all times and to be with them and their ministry. Paul recognizes the difficulties that lay ahead for the

Thessalonians with these warnings and ends the letter with the greatest hope that could be offered to assist the Thessalonians against these challenges and their ongoing ministry. He offers them God's peace in verse 16 and His grace in verse 18.

8. Paul doesn't ask God to send his angel or his minister to provide the Thessalonians God's peace. Nor does he only implore God's peace and grace at a specific time or place. Instead he offers God's grace and peace to them at all times directly from God Himself. **How does God's peace and grace brought to you by God Himself at all times and in all places give you hope as a Christian? What does it feel like to have a personal relationship with God and to know that he wants to grant us his peace and grace?**
  
9. There is one key word Paul includes in both verses 16 and 18, which is important to emphasize. Paul asks that the Lord be with you **all** in verse 16 and that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you **all** in verse 18. **Who do you think Paul is referring to when he refers to you all? Do you think this includes those Thessalonians he was rebuking and correcting in other parts of chapter 3? If so, what does this reveal about God the Father, His mercy, and His grace? Ultimately, how should we then pray for and minister to those whom Paul rebukes and corrects?**
  
10. **How can we best apply these lessons to our group and our community? How can we ensure this group is a place where God's presence, His peace, and his mercy endures at all times? How can we spread God's presence, peace, and mercy beyond the group into the communities we live and work in?**

### **Closing/application**

God blesses us all with spiritual gifts that He intends for us to apply to our respective vocations. Ultimately God desires that we earn our own keep, we provide for ourselves and our families, and we give generously to our church and our community. The only way we can do these things is by working hard and not being idle. As disciples of Christ we will inevitably encounter those who choose not to work or to purposely be a burden on Christians who have the means and motivation to provide for their own. Paul implores us to not enable these people and also do not let them discourage us from our mission. We are to withdraw from them, but not treat them as an enemy of the church. We hope and pray that they can learn the error of their way and can find Christ through learning to work hard and provide for themselves. Whether they realize their fault or not, we are told to treat them as brothers and to reflect God's peace and grace to all.

God desires all his children to have His peace, His presence, and His grace at all times and in all places, despite our circumstances. Therefore we have confidence engaging with our brothers in Christ and in our communities at work and home. We should feel free to be

ambassadors in Christ to all around us, knowing that God is with us and with Him all things are possible.

**References:**

EnduringWord.com, 2018, "2 Thessalonians3 - Guidance for Church Life," Bible commentary, available online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/2-thessalonians-3/> (20 February 2021).