

A Discover Together Bible Study by Sue Edwards

1 & 2 Thessalonians: Discovering Hope in a Promised Future

Leader's Guide

Before You Begin . . .

Why I'm excited about this study

Hope comforts. Hope empowers. As our culture unravels, we desperately need hope to see beyond the headlines and disunity that plagues our world today. This study offers women substantive hope that God is in control and moving forward to establish a final culmination of all chaos. He promises his followers new life in a future Kingdom, a glorious place of peace, justice, and righteousness. Paul wrote about this new life in these two letters to the Thessalonians two thousand years ago, but their message is still relevant today. I fervently pray that as you lead women through the letters, you will all find the hope in Christ that uplifts, sustains, and propels you forward to a fruitful life regardless of outward challenges.

I'm delighted that you have chosen to unearth this studies' riches. Although you may use this study guide for personal devotions, consider inviting other women to join you to add depth to your quest. If you invite other women to join you, familiarize yourself with the introductory sections of the study guide and this overview. Then, as you work your way through the study, read the week-by-week leader's guide. I have included discussion topics particular to that lesson,

troubleshooting tips, pointed out end times emphases so you don't miss them, activity ideas, and other pertinent information and counsel to aid in a productive group experience.

If you are new at leading a small group, be sure to digest the "Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders" before your first gathering. You'll find this resource on my website www.discovertogetherseries.com. along with other helpful tools. Even if you have led groups before, consider reviewing the instructions and tips in the Training Guide. Skilled leaders enhance the likelihood that a group will bond and thrive, but a poor leader usually stifles healthy interaction.

Adaptable Options for Your Calendar

This versatile study works for either 5, 3, or 8 weeks. You can mix and match the components below to create a fall, spring, or summer study that fits your needs. It's optimal to study both letters together but women will benefit from any of the choices above. Which of these approaches will better suit your needs? Prayerfully mix and match the various options to tailor-make a transformative learning experience for women.

If you desire to extend your study by one or two weeks, consider spending the first week bonding by getting to know one another better and the second week becoming familiar with the introductory sections of the study through discussion or teaching. Learn more in *Effective Use of Introductory Sections* on page ____.

Goal of the Study

The goal of this study is to prepare Christians to overcome a sense of hopelessness that easily results if we keep our eyes downward instead of looking up to focus on our relationship with Jesus and the biblical truth and wisdom he provides in his Word. Of course, we all battle fear and worry as we deal with life in a fallen world. When we encounter a crisis, it's only human to feel discouraged. God has emotions and we are made in his image. This means we are blessed with emotions too. Without healthy emotions we would be little robots, unfeeling and uncaring. Our emotions are an integral part of what makes us able to love, experience joy, feel empathy and passion, and delight at the beauty of God's creation. However, when negative emotions like fear, panic, and hopelessness take over our lives, we find ourselves enslaved and unable to flourish. When women immerse themselves in God's Word about hope in Christ, they can strengthen their

armory of faith and overcome emotional bondage by learning biblical attitudes, thinking patterns, and actions.

How to Lead If Lesson Time Is Limited

A thorough study of any biblical text is vital for biblical literacy resulting in sound application but if you aren't able to go through all the questions without rushing or giving everyone time to participate, consider these tips:

- As the leader, quickly summarize any introductory material and move into the questions. Don't read notes or other lesson sections unless needed for clarification.
- Answer observations from the text yourself as the leader or limit the response to one person.
- Skip questions that you discern are not central to the meaning of the biblical text.
- Just focus on one section of the lesson that you sense is most applicable to your particular group. That's better than skipping around and choosing a question here and there. Understanding the flow of the text is important and builds toward valid application. Otherwise, you risk Scripture-twisting.

A Safe Place

Making the group an open, protected place will be especially important as you discuss these serious issues. We need a place where we can be brutally honest about our shortcomings, doubts and fears. We need a place where no questions are off-limits. Your role as a leader is to create a safe place to process and share. Safe places destroy roadblocks to faith, resulting in spiritual, emotional, and mental health. As you guide the group with skill and a caring heart, women may actually change the way they think, feel, and act. What a privilege!

In order to help women today work through hopelessness, we need to process these issues in our own lives, so I've asked related share questions. If you are leading a new group of strangers, these questions may be a bit daunting. Do all you can to create a safe place but realize that some women are uncomfortable talking about deep hurts with people they don't know well. You may need to set the example for them by sharing your own hurts. If the women refuse to discuss some of the questions, don't be discouraged and don't try to force them. Simply do the best you can and focus on the questions that require less vulnerability or talk about some of the introductory

material before lesson 1. As the women learn to know and trust one another, you'll likely see more depth in sharing.

Design of the Study

Each lesson walks you, verse by verse, through the text. Observation, interpretation, application, correlation, opinion, and share questions flow, guiding you through the passages to help you grasp God's intended meaning and apply it to life today. This methodical approach is based on sound interpretive principles designed to reduce error and speculation. Occasionally women will be asked to place themselves into the setting or the shoes of participants; this exercise, although somewhat speculative, helps the passage come alive in the mind's eye of contemporary readers. Opinion and share questions aid in application to current and personal issues.

The goal is more than head knowledge—it's life change. Authentic growth includes new convictions and attitudes. The lessons are designed to move the student's learning from head to heart to hand.

I will provide short commentaries on unclear or perplexing passages. My goal in this Leader's Guide is not to overwhelm you with massive amounts of information but instead to give you concise answers that will help you guide your group through any rough spots. It also provides additional quality resources for further study on your own.

You'll want to acquaint yourself and your students with the resources available to enhance your study experience:

Memory Verse. Each lesson begins with an optional memory verse related to the main topic that week. Use this tool on a volunteer basis only.

Digging Deeper. Some women will want to work the optional Digging Deeper questions located in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work on these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a particular Digging Deeper question

and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that particular Digging Deeper, widening the discussion if possible.

Quotes, Background Info, and Extras. Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any especially resonates with you, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

In addition, take advantage of the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” available at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

Effective Use of Introductory Sections

Biblical Illiteracy is becoming a serious problem in our churches today, even among women who attend Bible study. As a result, I’ve created new introductory sections to help women learn more about how to overcome this trend in their own lives:

- *Why and How to Study the Bible*
- *How to Get the Most Out of a Discover Together Bible Study*
- *What Is an Inductive Study and Why Is It So Powerful?*

I’ve also created resources specific to this study because it contains passages that teach us about God’s end times plans:

- *Different Perspectives About End Times*
- *The Author’s Perspective*
- *How to Disagree Agreeably*

In addition, at the end of the study, I’ve included a guide to words that may be new to some women. These words relate to end times and appear throughout the study. I hope this glossary is helpful.

- *Handy Glossary of End Times Terms*

Consider whether or not the women in your study would benefit from discussing this introductory material before they begin on Lesson 1. You might spend your first week together, possibly two weeks, bonding as a group by getting to know one another better and

complementing that time discussing and/or teaching concepts from these important introductory sections.

Will You End with a Wrap-Up Message?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. When you wear your small-group leader's hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher's hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth. Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a thirty-minute formal lecture, more like a senior pastor's Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you're meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

If you believe that God may want you to teach the Bible, step out and try. Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers. Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed below. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts too. So, if something in you says, "teach!"—then go for it!

Introductory Teaching Ideas

If you plan to include lecture in your format, you may want to begin with a message on the pandemic of hopelessness in women today. Don't shame women who struggle. Don't advise women on whether or not to seek medical help or take medication. That's not your role. Delve into research on the topic and help women understand reasons why so many women are caught up in a web of worry. Share your own struggles. If you take on a teaching role, do they need to get to know you as their teacher? Do they need an opportunity to learn more about each other? Do they need time to interact, building trust and comfort in the group? Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you as you consider how to prepare your group for the study.

Enlist Women to Teach with You

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in her thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She will need a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I've worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist they review their message with you. Stress that if they're a "time hog," group time will be shorter, irritating group participants. Use wisdom as you select women presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

If you decide on a "teaching team" approach, offer training. See the book list below to read and discuss together. Write out your messages and give them to each other before teaching the larger group. Meet together to ensure cohesive teaching around a common theme to smooth out a disjointed feeling in the series. Seek out training, live or online, but vet it first. For in-depth transformational training consider seminary. Today, the seminary where I teach and many others offer online options as well as hybrid and intensive courses that make a seminary degree feasible from anywhere in the world. Check out their websites!

Resources to Help You Teach with Accuracy and Skill

Bruce, Barbara. *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.

Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006.

Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Swindoll, Charles R. *Touching Others with Your Words*. New York: Faith Words, 2012.

Resources to Help You Study 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Online

An excellent free online resource are the Bible notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Dallas Seminary Professor. His commentaries are thorough, clear, and practical, but not overly detailed or tedious. His resources provide quality help for both academic and lay teachers and leaders. Find them on www.planobiblechapel.org/soniclight.

Books

Michael W. Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians, The NIV Application Commentary, From biblical text to contemporary life*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.

Irving L. Jensen, *1 & 2 Thessalonians, A Self-Study Guide*, Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1974.

John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1991.

John F. Walvoord and Mark Hitchcock, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012.

John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition.*, editors Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985.

Jeffrey D. Weima, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary in the New Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014.

Lesson 1

Get Acquainted

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them the opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray. Then spend some time getting to know one another. You might, for example, ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about family, hobbies, what she likes to do

on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or ice breaker games.

To help your group bond or focus on the study theme, find Google ice breakers, community builder games, or locate an activity that suits your purpose for the first gathering. You might also tell a great story or illustration about a woman who overcame hopelessness. Relate the story or exercise to the upcoming study where the group will learn how to actually apply what they are learning. Remind them that they will need one another, as well as God, to succeed. You may want to pray for one another as you close.

Get Focused

Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Create and discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.

Discuss Lesson 1

Did you ask the women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, dive in. Paraphrase parts of the introductory section and ask the first question. Spend more time on the share and opinion questions, but don't skip observation (What does the text say?) and interpretation questions (What does the text mean?). If you do, you will interrupt the flow of the discussion, as many questions are based on previous questions. If you don't want to spend time discussing the observation question, you may summarize the answer yourself and then move into other kinds of questions.

If you run out of time, cut questions that do not hinder the logical flow of the lesson. If you don't have enough time to cover all the questions well, you may simply want to discuss one part of the lesson thoroughly and not address every section. Make the questions work for you and your group.

Point out that the lesson is peppered with notes to help with difficult passages and to give helpful background. Tell them to read the quotes in the sidebars as time allows. If they desire more, encourage them to tackle the Digging Deeper questions. These added elements should bring the truths of the lesson to life and you may even want to discuss them.

Lesson Content

The purpose of lesson one is to acquaint students with the birth of the Thessalonian church from the book of Acts (17:1-14) and to learn about Paul's relationship with the people there as well as the difficulties the Thessalonians were facing.

Troubleshooting

Question 4 asks why the author only mentioned Jason's first name. The reason may be because everyone reading the letter was so familiar with him that more identification wasn't necessary. Thus, we can assume that he was well known, possibly because of his status in the church and because of his actions on Paul's behalf.

When students observe the greeting in Paul's first letter, they can glean important insights. Question 9 asks the women to look at the second letter and note that Paul wrote these letters himself. In making this point, we can conclude that sometimes Paul enlisted a scribe. Even so, Paul includes the names of his co-workers Silas and Timothy in the greetings of both letters. We observe his tendency to work with others rather than alone, giving them credit and modeling community and teamwork.

Also, question 10 probes for insight we might be prone to skip over. In verse 1, he writes that the Thessalonians are "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This statement and the two related passages, Colossians 3:3 and John 15:1 and 5, tell us that even by the first century, Jesus and the Father were considered to be equally God. Paul calls Jesus "Lord," a term reserved only for God himself. This theological truth is important because early in the church and for centuries in early church history, false teachers penetrated the church saying that in some ways, Jesus was less than the Father, subservient to the Father, and not fully God. These arguments continued until the church fathers met and hammered out creeds and confessions to declare these ideas heretical. This truth is critical because only One who is fully God is sinless and, without coercion, voluntarily chose to atone for the sins of humankind.

End Times Emphasis

In many of the lessons in this study, Paul includes important information about end times events. I've asked questions that highlight these important insights so you don't miss them. We find the end times emphasis in chapter 1 in verse 10: *They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath (1:9–10)*. Those who hold a premillennial, pretribulation view of end times events as I do believe that Jesus rescues Christians from “the coming wrath” of the seven-year Tribulation (Daniel 9:25-27). For more explanation of these events, see pages _____ of the *Glossary of End Times Terms* at the end of your study guide. Be sure to reserve plenty of time to discuss question 17, especially since it's at the end of your lesson.

Creative Arts Ideas

- Look for stories or poems about brave women who have endured difficult situations without giving in to the hopelessness they felt and share these with the group. If you don't have time to read these stories or poems in the group, ask the women to make copies or e-mail them for participants to read outside group time. Consider choosing the best and reading them during a final wrap-up week, as a review of what you learned.
- Ask each woman to write down a particular struggle that she would like to commit to God and learn to overcome during the study. One way to provide confidentiality is to furnish black ink and black paper. Then pray over the struggles and place them where they can be seen each week. Or you may want to bury them, or plant them under some flowers. Find some way to creatively express your commitment and faith that God is working as you grow through the study. The women in the group can also suggest ideas.
- One of the ways we show we are made in the image of our all-creative God is to give participants opportunities to express their own creativity and then highlight these expressions and gifts. Do you have participants who might like to write a drama or choreograph a dance and then present their creation before the group? If so, give them an opportunity.

- Find a quality DVD to play that brings the text alive and show it.

Lesson 2: The Family Way

Lesson Content

Paul writes this letter from Corinth, probably because he's heard that people with dubious motives are attempting to take advantage of Paul's absence and distort Paul's teaching. He contrasts these "wolves in sheep's clothing" with the way he treated them when he was with them, like an affectionate mother and an encouraging father. He calls them brothers and sisters, using healthy family imagery to suggest that God's church is meant to function like a caring family. Without directly accusing his enemies, he warns the Thessalonians gently, hoping they will see the danger for themselves. He will express his concerns more fully in his second letter.

Troubleshooting

When studying a New Testament letter, we hear only one side of the conversation. We don't know what questions the writer is answering or what situations he's addressing. Answering question 3, "Why do you think Paul felt he needed to defend his motives and his conduct?" may require us to attempt to "read between the lines" a bit. It's likely that Paul is contrasting his words and actions with false teachers who have recently infiltrated the church in his absence. Often during Paul's ministry, false teachers attempted to distort his messages and step into his place of prominence for selfish gain.

Paul begins chapter 2 by recalling the terrible mistreatment he received at Philippi. Then he reminds the recipients of this letter of his actions and attitudes toward them when he was with them. He says that his motives are pure, that they've seen ample evidence that God approves of his ministry among them, and that he's never given them evidence that his desire is to take advantage of them and benefit himself. He didn't use flattery when he was with them, nor did he benefit financially from them. Instead of directly condemning the false teachers, Paul contrasts the way he treated them instead. Paul writes more about his opponents in 2:14-16.

We see similar situations in churches today. Help the women "connect the dots." I've added several sidebars to address this issue both there in Thessalonica and in churches today. However, guide the conversation away from naming specific people and ministries.

End Times Emphasis

Question 16 focused on 2:19 and 20: *For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*

Here, again, we observe Paul speaking about end times events. He asks two rhetorical questions. First, and it might have been clearer if he'd asked "who," he asked *what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes?* Then he answers by claiming that they, the Thessalonians, are his great joy and will be his crown. He's talking about the Rapture, when Jesus returns to earth to take believers to heaven to escape the Tribulation. At that time Paul will stand before Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Bema (2 Corinthians 5:10), as will all believers, and present the fruit of his life, his good works. One of those good works will be his ministry in the lives of the Thessalonians. As a result, Jesus will present Paul with rewards, symbolized by "crowns." See the different crowns described in Scripture in the Glossary of End Times Terms on page _____ at the end of your study guide for details. Paul is hopeful and joyful, anticipating this glorious day.

Remind the women in the group that they too will stand before Christ at the Bema and present the fruit of their lives to Jesus. We will learn more about this wonderful privilege later in the study.

Creative Arts Ideas

- If any ballet or modern dancers attend your study or your church, ask them to choreograph a dance that illustrates the day when Jesus returns for believers at the Rapture and we present him with the fruit of our lives. Then culminate your time together watching an artistic portrayal of this splendid event.
- Choose a worship song that complements this week's lesson and sing it together in praise and anticipation of the truths you've learned. To make it extra special, enlist someone who signs for the deaf to illustrate the song in hand motions.

Lesson 3: How to Live Out Family Love

Lesson Content

Lesson 3 covers a variety of topics: expressing love from a distance, responding well to persecution and hardships, a call to holiness, especially sexual purity, and a command to work hard, mind your own business, and lead a quiet life. If this is too much to cover in your discussion time, pick one or more topics and focus on those sections.

Troubleshooting

Questions 5 and 6 contain two lists for the women to consider. The first is a list of natural but flawed responses to trials in life. The second is a list of healthier thinking patterns that reflect ways God uses trials in our lives for our good and to influence others to trust him and accept the gospel. Encourage the women not to see the responses in the second list through the eyes of self-condemnation but to realize that, as a loving Father, God sometimes disciplines us for our ultimate good and these could be examples (Hebrews 12:7-11). Refusing to acknowledge this reality doesn't help us in the long run. God's discipline is always in our best interest.

End Times Emphasis

Chapter 3 ends with a benediction that culminates with verse 13; *May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.* Again, Paul emphasizes that Jesus is coming back. I believe he's referring to the Rapture and I've included both a personal sidebar and a quote from renowned eschatology Bible scholar John Walvoord to support this view. Be sure to help women understand that their holiness comes from trust in what Jesus did for them on the cross. He took believers' sin upon Himself so that they could stand holy and blameless before the Lord. This text refers to the Rapture when Jesus takes us to heaven for seven years to await the inauguration of his Kingdom, while those on earth experience the Tribulation.

Creative Arts Ideas

- Enlist a panel of both single and married women who have struggled with sexual purity and found tremendous joy in the forgiveness Jesus offers, as well as strength to lead a pure life now, called secondary virginity.

- Enlist a panel of women who have overcome serious trials and, with God's help, thrived regardless. Ask them to share actions and attitudes that helped them recover.

Lesson 4: I'll Fly Away

Lesson Content

This lesson digs into one of the most revealing passages the Lord has given us related to what happens when believers die. It begins asking about attitudes toward death and grieving and then moves into four key questions people typically ask about death and specifically what occurs for believers. Almost the entire lesson emphasizes the end times. I suggest that you spend as much time as possible answering these four questions methodically and carefully, as each concept builds on the next. This text tells us more about the details of the Rapture than any other passage in the Bible. I also refer to other texts that support and expand our understanding of these verses. These are among the most exciting truths in the entire Bible!

Lesson 5: Live Out Your Glorious Hope

Lesson Content

This lesson finishes our journey through Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. It's full of practical insights into how to live well in light of our glorious future. He begins by instructing us all how to treat Christian leaders and how to navigate general disagreements in the church. He ends with five mandates to help actually practice peacemaking in our daily lives.

End Times Emphasis

Paul ends with a blessing that includes another reference to the rapture: *May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (5:23b)*. Peppered throughout this first letter are references to the Thessalonians' glorious future and ours. It's not an accident!

Creative Arts Idea

If you are not continuing on in your study of the second Thessalonian letter, find a way to celebrate what you've learned and the relationships you've built. Schedule a time to share what's

been most meaningful to participants or give them a way to create an artistic expression of what they've learned—a poem, painting, sculpture, song, or play and share their creations with the other women. I find these kinds of celebrations punctuated with the women's creative expressions cements what they've learned and enriches their experiences. See the creative poetry ending the lessons as examples. (If you decide to use Misty's poetry.)

Lesson 6:

Lesson Content

Again, Paul writes about false teachers infiltrating the church. He spoke about them indirectly in his first letter (2:1-16). Now he's more direct, warning the Thessalonians and spelling out the ultimate destiny of these troublemakers who reject Christ and his sacrifice on their behalf and attempt to wreak havoc the church. This leads him to write more about the end times for God's beloved. He concludes with a beautiful prayer asking God to bless believers with power to live a fruitful life of faithful deeds.

Troubleshooting

Question 7 asks, *How does God feel about unbelievers (2 Peter 3:8, 15; Matthew 23:37)?* I follow this question with a Digging Deeper question which says: *The word punish in 1:8 is a strong word and some use it to paint God as vindictive and angry, desiring to enact personal revenge on those who reject Jesus. However, this is not true. God is not angry with the sinner; he is angry with the sin. Have you ever heard someone use this argument against God? How could you counter this view by explaining more about the character of God?*

To answer these questions and to be comfortable with the answers, one must understand the character of God--that he is both all loving AND holy. This means he cannot overlook sin. He is not personally vengeful as some believe but must be true to his character of holiness. Helpful resources include *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer, and *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis.

If women in your group struggle with these concepts or the idea that those who reject the gospel have chosen not to be with God and he shuts them out at their request, offer these books

or bring in a respected theologian in person, via the internet, or through an online podcast or other video recording to talk about these truths.

Question 8 reads, *Who is responsible to ensure that anyone who truly desires to know God will have that opportunity (2 Chronicles 16:9)?* The first part of the verse reads, *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him...* This text is one of the reasons I became a believer. I had a genuine problem with the idea that if someone had not heard about Christ, God rejected them, but in a seeker's meeting when I was 24 years old, a gentleman used this passage to show me that God looks throughout the whole earth to see those who want to know Him, and He reveals Himself to them if they really do. Sometimes it's through dreams, as we see in Muslim countries today. Sometimes it's through literature as it was in Russia during the cold war. Because of God's character, He cannot and will not let anyone perish who has a heart for him. Again, understanding the character of God is vital to gaining insight into deep theological questions that can hinder seekers from accepting Christ. If someone in your group struggles with this question, feel free to refer them to my answer in the leader's guide.

End Times Emphasis

Question 10 reads, *How is this event different from the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17?* The answer to the question is that these verses refer to Jesus' return to earth after the Tribulation to set up his millennial kingdom. We know this because Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 that *Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.* Nowhere does the Bible describe the rapture this way. However, Revelation 19:12 and 14 speaks about Jesus returning to earth after the Tribulation accompanied with "blazing fire" and "his powerful angels." Pay close attention to every word to fit the puzzle pieces in the right place!

I follow this question with a note that says, *It's easy to become confused between the Rapture and Jesus' return to earth after the Tribulation. The purpose of his first coming over 2,000 years ago was to teach truth and provide the once-for-all-sacrifice for our sins. I like to think of his future second coming in two phases:*

In the first phase of the second coming, the Rapture, Jesus snatches believers away to heaven to escape the earth's upcoming Tribulation.

In the second phase of the second coming, Jesus returns to earth, with raptured and resurrected believers, as judge to set up his millennial kingdom.

Be sure women understand that this view teaches these vital concepts.

Lesson 7: When Lawlessness Reigns

Lesson Content

The false teachers were teaching the Thessalonians that they were now living in the “Day of the Lord” which they understood to be the Tribulation. This confused and alarmed them. Paul wrote to quell their fears and to ensure them that this awful day could not be upon them because necessary events in God’s end times timetable had not yet occurred. One event that the world would experience first was a great rebellion overseen by someone he called *the man of lawlessness*. Paul assured them that the Holy Spirit now active in Christians in the world held back those events. But once Christians were taken out of the world in the Rapture, the Holy Spirit would no longer be there to harness evil and wickedness would take over, bringing on the Tribulation, with the man of lawlessness leading it.

Paul also reveals that *the Lord Jesus will overthrow this man of lawlessness with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.* (2:8). This language matches up with the description of the second phase of Jesus’s coming back to earth to set up his Kingdom in Revelation 19:15.

Paul finishes the chapter with a challenge to stand firm and to hold fast to his teachings instead of being influenced by the false teachers who were precursors to the man of lawlessness. He concludes with another prayer blessing them with *eternal encouragement and good hope* (2:16) as well as the strength to live obediently (2:17). Consider the idea that God plans to encourage you for all eternity!

End Times Emphasis

Much of this lesson focuses on revealing important information about God’s end times timetable. Included is 2:14: *He called you through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Don’t let your group overlook these magnificent words! Those who love the Lord and have accepted his free gift of eternal life through his sacrifice for their sins on the cross are destined to share in his glory. Take that in and savor it! Revelation repeats this concept in 22:5

when it ends with *And they will reign forever and ever*, referring to his servants who will serve him in verse 3. Somehow believers will serve and reign with Christ in his millennial Kingdom and in the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelation 21 and 22). What an incentive to live for the Lord now regardless of the difficulties and challenges we might face!

Lesson 8: Whistle While You Wait

Lesson Content

Paul ends his second letter with more exhortations on how to live well as they wait for the rapture to kick off God's end times timetable. They had no idea how long they would wait and neither do we. But for each succeeding generation, the mandate is the same, wait with faithful expectation and do all the good you can, confident that God's timing is perfect.

The Thessalonians experienced a similar situation that many of us experience. Some people work hard and some people prefer to be lazy and live off of others. These idlers are not people who genuinely need help for a variety of reasons. Christians are commanded to care for them with compassion and generosity. But idlers are a different group.

Some Thessalonians, expecting Jesus to return for them any day, decided to discontinue working and simply sit idly by and wait. Paul rebukes them, especially because resentment toward them was building and was sure to cause disunity in the church. Paul's instructions were aimed at the hard workers, advising them how to treat the idlers with tough redemptive love, hoping to cause them to repent.

Troubleshooting

I've included a note after question 4 to soften Paul's language a bit when he says not to associate with idlers. He makes it clear in 3:15 that he's not advising hard workers to shun idlers but instead to withdraw the privileges of intimate fellowship and possibly participating in church rituals in order to move them toward repentance and a change of attitude and behavior. The principle of applying consequences to sinful or foolish actions is never for the purpose of spite or revenge but to cause the offender to rethink their waywardness and return to a life of obedience. In Matthew 5:43, the great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to love our "enemies" but

sometimes that requires us to love them with a cleansing redemptive kind of love. Help women who might use these passages to act unkindly toward another or respond with hate to rethink Paul's meaning.

Creative Arts Ideas

- Ask someone in your study or community to create a drama based on *The BEMA, A Story About the Judgment Seat of Christ* by Tim Stevenson (Fair Havens Publications, 2000) and act it out sometime during your study.
- Ask someone gifted at poetry reading to recite some of Misty's poems and follow that recitation with a discussion on the meaning of the poem and how it relates to what they've learned in their study.

Will You Say Good-bye or Go on Together?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don't be pressured into continuing against your better judgment.

If you determine you're excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If so, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study and what changes might be in order, if any.

(See www.discovertogetherseries.com for additional study options.)

Either way, use this last gathering to review and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure, possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. For example, you might talk about how God has helped you understand his great plan for your future with him. You could list benefits you enjoyed as a result of the study. You might talk about changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank

God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say good-bye and pray for them.