

## Living in the Light of the Return of the Lord

1st and 2nd Thessalonians were written by Paul to the church in Thessalonica. They were young believers who had grown and learned so much when Paul was with them. They had spread that gospel to others and were a growing church. However, they were wavering in their beliefs due to a group among them giving false information. Paul writes these letters to remind them of the truths he taught them and to encourage them in their faith. He gives details of future events, the Lord's return and of the Day of the Lord.

Let's find out about these Thessalonians and these two special, future events.

Play out the messages in 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

**Objectives:** Praise God as a family.

Have fun with your family.

**Number of Players:** 4 or more (Paul, Timothy, Thessalonians) (Timothy will be doing a lot of reading,

make sure to choose someone who can and likes to read out loud)

**Length:** 40 minutes

**Set up:** give roles to everyone. If you have more than 3 people, make more Thessalonians.

You can get as elaborate as you like -- use costumes and props too.

As the Narrator is reading, the separate characters should act out what is being said.

**Narrator:** Because of Paul's concern for the young church at Thessalonica, he sent Timothy to check on them. Timothy brings a report to Paul that they are doing well. However, they have many questions and could use some clarifying instructions. Consequently, Paul writes to them to remind them of the truths he taught them while he was with them, and to encourage them in the good work that is being done through them. Timothy carries Paul's letter to them.

**Timothy:** (to the Thessalonians) Greetings brothers and sisters. I have a letter from Paul with his greetings and the answers to your questions. Shall I read it to you?

**Thessalonians:** Oh thank you Timothy for coming all this way with news of our brother Paul and answers to our questions. Please, come in, have a seat. And, yes, Please, read us his letter!

**Timothy (reading the letter from Paul):** I, Paul, together here with Silas and Timothy, send greetings to you. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Day and night you're in our prayers as we call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope in following the Lord Jesus Christ, before God our Father. It is clear to us, friends, that God not only loves you very much but also has put His hand on you for something special. When the gospel we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions.

You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated Jesus. Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit!—taking the trouble with the joy, the joy with the trouble.



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Do you know that all over the provinces of both Macedonia and Achaia believers look up to you? The word has gotten around. Your lives are echoing the Lord Jesus. The news of your faith in God is out. People come up and tell us how you received us with open arms, how you deserted the dead idols of your old life so you could embrace and serve God, the true God. They marvel at how expectantly you await the arrival of his Son, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescued us from certain doom.

Even though we had some standing as Christ's apostles, we never threw our weight around or tried to come across as important, with you or anyone else, but we cared for you the way a mother cares for her children. We loved you dearly. Not content to just pass on the good news, we wanted to give you our hearts. And we did.

You remember us in those days, friends, working our fingers to the bone, up half the night, moonlighting so you wouldn't have the burden of supporting us while we proclaimed God's Message to you. You saw with your own eyes how discreet and courteous we were among you. And God knows we weren't freeloaders! You experienced it all firsthand. With each of you we were like a father with his child, holding your hand, whispering encouragement, showing you step-by-step how to live well before God, who called us into His own kingdom, into this delightful life.

But now that Timothy is back, bringing this terrific report on your faith and love, we feel a lot better. It's especially gratifying to know that you continue to think well of us, and that you want to see us as much as we want to see you! In the middle of our trouble and hard times here, just knowing how you're doing keeps us going. Knowing that your faith is alive keeps us alive.

What would be an adequate thanksgiving to offer God for all the joy we experience before Him because of you? We do what we can, praying away, night and day, asking for the bonus of seeing your faces again and doing what we can to help when your faith falters.

One final word, friends. We ask you—urge is more like it—that you keep on doing what we told you to do to please God, not in a dogged religious plod, but in a living, spirited dance. You know the guidelines we laid out for you from Jesus. God wants you to live a pure life.

And regarding the question, friends, that has come up about what happens to those already dead and buried, we don't want you in the dark any longer. First off, you must not carry on over them like people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word. Since Jesus died and broke loose from the grave, God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus.

And then this: We can tell you with complete confidence that when Jesus comes again to get us, those of us who are still alive will not get a jump on the dead and leave them behind. In actual fact, they'll be ahead of us. The Master Himself will give the command. Archangel thunder! God's trumpet blast! He'll come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise—they'll go first. Then the rest of us who are still alive at the time will be caught up with them into the clouds to meet Jesus. Oh, we'll be walking on air! And then there will be one huge family reunion with Him. So reassure one another with these words.

I don't think, friends, that I need to deal with the question of when all this is going to happen. You know as well as I that the day of Jesus' coming can't be posted on our calendars. He won't call ahead and make an appointment any more than a burglar would. About the time everybody's walking around complacently, congratulating each other—"We've sure got it made! Now we can



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take it easy!"—suddenly everything will fall apart. It's going to come as suddenly and inescapably as birth pangs to a pregnant woman.

But friends, you're not in the dark, so how could you be taken off guard by any of this? You're sons of Light, daughters of Day. We live under wide open skies and know where we stand. So let's not sleepwalk through life like those others. Let's keep our eyes open and be smart. People sleep at night and get drunk at night. But not us! Since we're creatures of Day, let's act like it. Walk out into the daylight sober, dressed up in faith, love, and the hope of salvation.

God didn't set us up for an angry rejection but for salvation by Jesus Christ. He died for us, a death that triggered life. Whether we're awake with the living or asleep with the dead, we're alive with Him! So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it.

**Thessalonians:** Thank you Timothy. That helps so much. Grace and Peace to you and Paul and Silas.

**Narrator:** A few months go by and it comes to Paul's attention that some misunderstandings and false teachings about the end times have crept into the church. Paul writes another letter to the Thessalonians to clarify details regarding the end times and to assure them that they are not in the end times.. He is straight forward with them and explains truths to them. He exhorts them to stand firm in the faith.

**Timothy (to the Thessalonians):** Brothers! Sisters! Gather round, I have a new letter from Paul. Sshh! Pay attention everyone!

"Dear Thessalonian Believers, greetings in the name of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

You need to know, friends, that thanking God over and over for you is not only a pleasure; it's a must. We have to do it. Your faith is growing phenomenally; your love for each other is developing wonderfully. Why, it's only right that we give thanks. We're so proud of you. You're so steady and determined in your faith despite all the hard times that have come down on you

All this trouble is a clear sign that God has decided to make you fit for the kingdom. You're suffering now, but justice is on the way. When Jesus appears out of heaven in a blaze of fire with His strong angels, He'll even up the score by settling accounts with those who gave you such a bad time. His coming will be the break we've been waiting for. Eternal exile from the presence of God and His splendid power is their sentence. But on that very same day when He comes, He will be exalted by His followers and celebrated by all who believe—and all because you believed what we told you.

Now, friends, read these next words carefully. Slow down and don't go jumping to conclusions regarding the day when Jesus Christ will come back and we assemble to welcome Him. Don't let anyone shake you up or get you excited over some breathless report or rumored letter from me that the day of His arrival has come and gone.

Before that day comes, a couple of things have to happen. First, the Apostasy. Second, the debut of the man of lawlessness. He'll defy and then take over every so-called god or altar. Having cleared away the opposition, he'll then set himself up in God's Temple as "God Almighty." Don't you remember me going over all this in detail when I was with you? Are your memories that short?



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You'll also remember that I told you the man of lawlessness is being held back until just the right time. That doesn't mean that the spirit of anarchy is not now at work. It is, secretly and underground. But the time will come when he will no longer be held back, but will be let loose. But don't worry. Jesus will be right on his heels and blow him away. The Master appears and—puff!—the man of lawlessness is out of there.

The man of lawlessness' coming is all Satan's work. All his power and signs and miracles are fake, evil sleight of hand that plays to the gallery of those who hate the truth that could save them. And since they're so obsessed with evil, God rubs their noses in it—gives them what they want. Since they refuse to trust truth, they're banished to their chosen world of lies and illusions.

Meanwhile, we've got our hands full continually thanking God for you, our good friends—so loved by God! God picked you out as His from the very start. Think of it: included in God's original plan of salvation by the bond of faith in the living truth. This is the life of the Spirit He invited you to through the good news we delivered, in which you get in on the glory of our Master, Jesus Christ.

So, friends, take a firm stand, feet on the ground and head high. Keep a tight grip on what you were taught, whether in personal conversation or by our letter. May Jesus Himself and God our Father, who reached out in love and surprised you with gifts of unending help and confidence, put a fresh heart in you, invigorate your work, enliven your speech.

One more thing, friends: Pray for us. Pray that the His Word will simply take off and race through the country to a ground-swell of response, just as it did among you. And pray that we'll be rescued from these scoundrels who are trying to do us in.

May the Master of Peace Himself give you the gift of getting along with each other at all times, in all ways. May Jesus be truly among you!

I, Paul, bid you good-bye in my own handwriting. I do this in all my letters, so examine my signature as proof that the letter is genuine.

The incredible grace of our Master, Jesus Christ, be with all of you!

**Discussion:** Have each person share how it felt to them to play the role they did and what insights they gained about the people they played. Questions to consider: How did God's love and care for the Thessalonians make itself known through Paul? Are you living your life looking for the return of our Lord Jesus? In what ways has that knowledge effected a decision you have made recently? Do you have questions about the rapture? (spend some time on this if there are questions--help each other to understand and find/research the answers) How do you think you will feel when that happens?

**Prayer:** Close in prayer thanking God for His provision and for all that you have learned and the fun you had with your family.