

September–December 2023



Day by Day with God

Rooting women's lives in the Bible

FEATURING TANYA MARLOW, AMY BOUCHER PYE AND SANDRA WHEATLEY

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Edited by Jackie Harris

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Plus, guest contributors **Sara Batts-Neale**, a priest in the diocese of Chelmsford; **Chine McDonald**, director of the Theos think tank; **Claire Musters**, writer and speaker; **Bridget Plass**, writer and speaker; and **Alianore Smith**, church partnership manager for International Justice Mission UK.

Welcome



Thank you for joining us to study God's word. You're in the company of women who know the value of regular Bible reading. We live in challenging times, but we believe that as we engage with God's word we will find encouragement, strength and a new vision of what God wants to do both in us and through us.

In this issue, we welcome back Mary Reid, a previous editor of *Day by Day with God*, who takes us through Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. It's a letter written to help Christians living in a complicated society, so it is very relevant for us today.

We also welcome Tanya Marlow to our team of contributors. Tanya is an author, speaker and broadcaster on faith and spirituality, as well as a campaigner for those with chronic illness. Through the lives of different women in the Bible, Tanya considers some of the challenges we face in our working lives. However, this isn't just about the paid work we do; we're encouraged to think about all the different roles we have, the things we do and how we do them.

Elsewhere, we draw practical advice for daily life from the book of Proverbs, learn how we can use scripture to help us conquer the 'giants' in our lives, find inspiration from Noah and survey David's prayer life. We'll also take some time to focus on God's kindness, to think about how we prepare for Christmas and then to reflect on the Christmas story and God's good news for all people.

We begin with a study on celebrations. In God's goodness, he designed times of rest, remembrance and celebration for his people. There was a rhythm to life that perhaps we need to rediscover, and it seems fitting to think about this as we approach the autumn and winter months with our own celebrations of Harvest, Remembrance, Advent and Christmas.

We're excited for the changes God is going to bring into our lives as we step aside from the noise and make time to listen to his word. May we know that whatever is happening around us, we are loved by God, and in him we live and move and have our being.

Jackie Harris, Editor

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians



Mary Reid writes:

One of the best holidays my husband and I have had was a cruise entitled 'Walking in the footsteps of St Paul'. It was very moving to visit the places where Paul had started churches, to stand where he had baptised Lydia and her household (Acts 16:11–15) and see where he had been imprisoned.

We stood by the sea at Troas and were reminded of how Paul had seen, in a vision, a man begging him to come to Macedonia to help them. Paul, Silas and Timothy would have sailed in a small boat – we travelled in air-conditioned comfort across the Aegean Sea to Thessalonica.

Thessalonica is a thriving, busy seaport, and it was thriving and busy in Paul's day. He did not stay long there – on three sabbaths he went to the synagogue and began teaching about the good news of Jesus. We read in Acts 17 that there was a large crowd of Greeks and many prominent women who listened and were transformed by his message. However, there were some Jews who were jealous of Paul's success and worked up mob violence against him; so after a comparatively short stay, he had to leave and move on to Berea. Here he again went to the synagogue and taught an even larger group about Jesus. Some of the Jews in Thessalonica heard about this, went to Berea and stirred up another mob, and Paul had to move on.

Paul didn't forget them. Timothy was able to keep him informed about the difficulties the Thessalonians were facing. The gospels had not been written at this time so they only had what they could remember of Paul's teaching. They were learning to live as a loving, sharing community, but some had got confused and despondent, disagreeing about when the Lord would come again. This second letter to the Thessalonian church was therefore vital to help them cope with these complicated issues.

As we look through this short letter, written to help those first Christians to be steady in their faith in a complicated society, it could well have been written to us in 2023.

Welcome greetings

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(NRSV)**

This letter is one of the earliest written by Paul. It must have been hugely welcomed by the new young church in Thessalonica as they badly needed some help with issues that were causing many differences of opinion among them.

The opening greeting was exactly what they needed to read. Letters were the only means of communication in those days and they would have been treasured.

When did you last receive a handwritten letter from someone very special to you? Communication in the 21st century is quick and easy. We can text someone we know living on the other side of the world. Mostly these communications are brief, with no opening greeting, and when the subject matter is dealt with, they are cleared. When my daughter and family lived in America, our main means of communication was by email. They were special so I printed off copies so I could read them again much later! Many years ago, well before the age of the internet, I emigrated to Canada. Letters were the only means of communication, and news from home was anxiously awaited and eagerly received.

Paul's letters would have been read and reread, discussed and prayed about. His letters were eventually gathered up and are now part of the New Testament, giving help and guidance to generations of Christians since.

Paul's opening greeting is as important to us today as it was then. Grace and peace are not emotions but gifts from God himself and Jesus Christ. In our far-from-peaceful world, we can live knowing the peace that only God can give.

Is there someone you could write to who is away from home and may need an encouraging letter?

MARY REID

Testing times

We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. (NRSV)

Paul begins this letter in exactly the right way. The new Christians in Thessalonica were beginning to be full of self-doubt – they were afraid their faith was not strong enough to be tested. Yet Paul had heard good things about them, that they were a growing and loving community, and he thanked God for them. His opening words would have given them great encouragement.

They were having a difficult time as they lived in a country where the gods of Greek and Roman paganism were everywhere. Paul assured them that he constantly prayed for them and that despite the situation they lived in, the name of Jesus would be glorified (vv. 11–12).

We need to pray for Christians struggling to live in an anti-Christian environment. There are many places in the world where it is dangerous to be openly Christian.

You don't have to be living overseas to know you are not welcomed as a Christian. My first job was working in the London office of a missionary society, but once I was 18 my rail fare went up and I needed to earn a bigger salary. I moved to another job, and it didn't take long to find the jokes and conversations were very different to those overheard in the missionary society! Officially we live in a Christian country but often it doesn't seem that way.

Paul says he can boast about those new Christians in Thessalonica because of the way they behaved with love towards one another. The way we behave in our everyday life is important. We need to remember that we represent Jesus in our home, workplace, church and neighbourhood.

Dear Lord, help me to represent you in all I do and say today. Amen

MARY REID

God is in control

As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed. (NRSV)

This part of Paul's letter is one of the most difficult pieces of the New Testament. The Thessalonians would have understood what Paul was writing about, but we do not live with the background that they had.

Some of the new young Christians thought Paul had told them that Jesus would be returning soon, and they were nervously waiting for this great day.

Almost all the Eastern faiths believed in a power of evil. Today we have only to watch the daily newscasts or read the papers to see that we live in a time when there are many evil things happening in the world. As I write these notes, the war in Ukraine, the deepening recession and learning to live with Covid can put us into a similar state as the Thessalonian Christians.

We know that our God is in control of all that is happening in our world. We are encouraged to pray for every situation and for those in need. We know that it is God's world, and he will have the final say.

Over the years, there have been Christians who have tried to work out the actual date of the second coming and have gathered on Mount Sinai ready to meet with the Lord. And nothing has ever happened! Jesus said that no one knows the day and time but God the Father (Mark 13:32). What we can be certain of is that all those who love the Lord will be there.

In the meantime, we live in a time when evil exists, but the Holy Spirit is with us in our everyday life. We can't sort out everything that is wrong in our world, but we can bring the love of Jesus to those we live and work with each day.

Pray for someone you know who is in real need today and thank God for something you hear that has helped others.

MARY REID

Hold fast

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. (NRSV)

Paul knew that learning to live as Christians in Thessalonian society was going to be difficult, and his advice to them was to stand firm and hold fast to everything they had so far heard about Jesus and God the Father. They had to remember what he had taught them.

We probably have more than one copy of the Bible in our possession, but we don't always carry one with us every day. It is as important for us to really know what we believe as it was for those early Christians.

As a teenager, I was given a small set of cards with important Bible quotations, plus references, to learn by heart. As I find learning anything by rote difficult, I was not too keen on them at the time, but as all my friends were using them, I persisted – and how glad I am now that I did. Over the years those texts have often come to mind just when I needed to know what to do or say as a Christian.

The words of hymns, too, can stick in the mind. In the 18th century, when John Newton, initially a slave trader, was converted he became a parish priest in Olney in Buckinghamshire. He was joined by William Cowper, a poet, and between them they wrote hymns for the parishioners, mostly uneducated silk workers. These people probably worked long hours and would doze off during sermons. Teaching them to sing gospel hymns was a brilliant idea. The words from hymns that we have sung for years help us in our everyday life to stand firm and hold fast to our faith.

Thank God for those who have helped you in your growth as a Christian.

MARY REID

Pray for us

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere. (NRSV)

Paul often faced opposition and violence (v. 2). He needed the Christians in Thessalonica to pray for his protection from those who opposed the gospel.

This still happens today. Not everyone who hears the gospel preached believes and can end up in opposition causing as much trouble as possible. We need to pray for our church leaders – they may not suffer the violent opposition that Paul experienced, but many smaller things can go wrong in a local church that make it difficult for the gospel to be spread in the community.

Prayer support is so important for every Christian working to take the love of God to others. Most missionary societies produce literature that gives information about their work and who to pray for each day. My husband once met an elderly, housebound woman who made it her life's work to pray for a different part of the world every day. She had collected information from many different societies, and on the table in front of her she laid out the appropriate leaflets about the area of the world she was praying for that day. She would never be able to meet these people, but she prayed for them by name, and for their needs. Hers was a truly important ministry.

We don't always have to be on our knees in a quiet place to pray. When my children were at the demanding preschool age, finding somewhere quiet to pray was difficult. Eventually, I found a small book with verses to read for every day of the year. I kept it on the bedroom windowsill so I could read it while the children thought I was making the beds, and it gave me ideas about what to pray for in the spaces of the day. Many years later this was exactly what *Day by Day with God* was produced for, to help busy women know what to pray for each day.

Spend time today praying for your church leaders as they seek to make Jesus known in your community.

MARY REID

An example to follow

Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. (NRSV)

How often do you hear that volunteers are needed in your church or community? I must admit that my reaction is not always good – I'm already too busy/too old/not gifted in that area!

Here Paul has heard that some of his new believers were so excited at the prospect of the second coming that they had given up any work and were 'living in idleness'. 'Anyone unwilling to work should not eat', writes Paul (v. 10). The Jewish law insisted that a trained Rabbi, as Paul was, should take no pay for his teaching but must have an honest trade. Paul was a tentmaker, and he worked day and night at this trade as an example for others to follow.

All too often in churches, and other organisations, there are people who take on the responsibility of running everything and many more who are happy to sit back and do nothing! One church I belonged to in Canada expected everyone to be involved in something to help in the running of the church. If you took on a major responsibility, you only did it for one year, then stood down and did a less time-consuming job, like delivering a few magazines. This worked very well, and I was impressed and tried to encourage this back in my home church.

There are always people who have gladly taken on a regular responsibility in the running of their church – from leading a weekly women's group to dealing with refreshments whenever needed. In a loving, caring church, others should make sure this work is shared to ensure those taking on such commitments have plenty of help and support. Paul urges us not to be weary in doing what is right – perhaps it would be good to reassess your use of time.

Are you involved too little, or too much, in your church community?

MARY REID

Peace be with you

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. (NRSV)

Right at the end of this short letter, Paul has some stern things to say to those who are causing trouble in the church (vv. 14–15). He is quite fierce, saying they must have nothing to do with troublemakers.

I know of one church where the congregation was completely split in two. One side was against the minister and the other side was completely for him. The argument had started between two people with different opinions, and then others had taken sides. Paul's advice was very much needed here – no one should take sides. The original troublemakers should have been left on their own until they felt ashamed of themselves.

However, all problems within church family need to be dealt with in a loving way. Having nothing to do with troublemakers doesn't mean they are judged as enemies – they are still our brothers and sisters in Christ. Forgiveness is a necessary ingredient and will ensure all problems are dealt with in love.

The Thessalonian church may have received letters 'from Paul' that were actually from someone else. This could have been why some of the believers were expecting Jesus to come back to them very soon. Another person may well have put his own opinion about the second coming in a letter and to give it authority had signed it as from Paul. Paul may well have realised this had happened and was the cause of all the trouble and confusion among the believers. Paul would have dictated his own letters to a scribe, so he ends this letter with his own signature, pointing out that his readers must learn to recognise the way he writes his name.

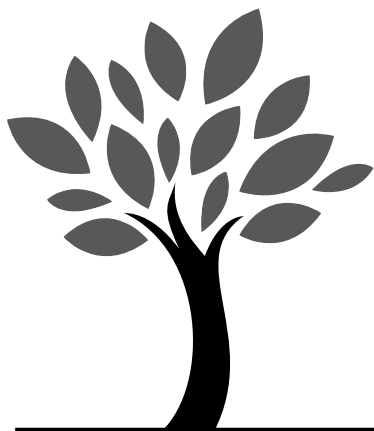
In his final words to them, he wishes them peace and grace, both gifts they needed in that early young church and gifts that we so much need today.

Dear Lord, help me to know your peace and grace today. Amen

MARY REID



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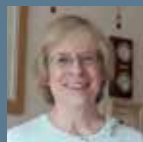
Day by Day with God provides a short printed Bible passage, explained and applied especially for women, by women who have themselves found the Bible a source of strength and inspiration for life.

A suggested daily prayer or meditation helps you connect the daily notes with your own spiritual journey as you seek to follow Jesus more closely.

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