

engage

The Bible gives us the big picture of God's plans for us. In this issue of **engage** we'll see humans try to mess up those plans, but we'll also see Jesus triumphing once and for all. And we have thought-provoking articles to help you make decisions, pray as you learn and share the gospel.

* **DAILY READINGS** Each day's page throws you into the Bible, to get you handling, questioning and exploring God's message to you — encouraging you to act on it and talk to God more in prayer.

THIS ISSUE: Encouraging words from **1 Thessalonians**; amazing adventures in **Judges**; the mission continues in **Acts**; darkness and light in **Lamentations**; and wait for God's day with **Zephaniah**.

* **TAKE IT FURTHER** If you're hungry for more at the end of an **engage** page, turn to the **Take it further** section to dig deeper.

* **REAL LIVES** True stories, revealing God at work in people's lives. This time — **the man who fought to abolish legal slavery**.

* **TRICKY** tackles those mind-bendingly tricky questions that confuse us all, as well as questions our friends bombard us with. This time: **Isn't living a good life enough?**

* **ESSENTIAL** Articles on the basics we really need to know about God, the Bible and Christianity. This issue, we look at what the Bible says about **Jesus, the man**.

* **STUFF** Articles on stuff relevant to the lives of young Christians. This issue: **Making big decisions**.

* **TOOLBOX** is full of tools to help you understand the Bible. This issue we concentrate on **praying about what you've read**.

All of us who work on engage are passionate to see the Bible at work in people's lives. Do you want God's word to have an impact on your life? Then open your Bible, and start on the first engage study right now...

HOW TO USE **engage**

- 1 Set a time you can read the Bible every day
- 2 Find a place where you can be quiet and think
- 3 Grab your Bible, pen and a notebook
- 4 Ask God to help you understand what you read
- 5 Read the day's verses with **engage**, taking time to think about it
- 6 Pray about what you've read

BIBLE STUFF

We use the NIV Bible version, so you might find it's the best one to use with **engage**. If the notes say "**1 Thessalonians 2 v 5–13**", look up 1 Thessalonians in the contents page at the front of your Bible. It'll tell you which page the book starts on. Find chapter 2 of 1 Thessalonians, and then verse 5 of chapter 2 (the verse numbers are the tiny ones). Then start reading. Simple.

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1 Thessalonians

Ready for Jesus?

When Paul and Silas first visited the bustling port of Thessalonica, things didn't exactly go to plan. As usual, Paul went to the synagogue and told people about Jesus Christ. Many people became Christians, but the local Jews went haywire, started a riot and chased Paul and Silas out of town.

Despite this violent opposition, the church in Thessalonica grew. Paul wrote this letter to the Christians there, to encourage them to stick at it and to make sure they didn't give up or listen to any of the false teaching that surrounded them.

So who is this letter for?

New Christians – If you've not been a Christian long and are still fired up about it, this book is packed with advice and teaching just for you.

Finding it tough – If the Christian life is really hard for you, and you're wondering if you can go on,

then read on. Paul was writing to Christians who were wobbling in their faith and needed to be put straight on a few things.

Strong Christians – Maybe you've been a Christian for years. Paul encourages such believers to get serious about God and about living for Him. It's time to sink your teeth into Paul's teaching, so you're ready for Jesus when He returns.

Non-Christians – If you're not a Christian or aren't sure if you are, 1 Thessalonians will put you straight. It outlines what Christianity is all about and why Jesus died and was raised back to life. It also tells us what life will be like as a Christian.

Whatever stage you're at, ask God to speak to you through this challenging and eye-opening letter. He will!

1

Christianity in conflict

The big city of Thessalonica had it all — sun, sea, sand and Caesar in charge. By the time Paul and Silas left, it was a story of synagogues, Scripture, scuffles and skedaddling.

 **Read Acts 17 v 1–10**

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *What did Paul preach about? (v3)*
- ▷ *What positive response did he receive? (v4)*
- ▷ *What did the Jews do? (v5–9)*
- ▷ *Why? (v5)*

Paul preached that Jesus is the Christ and the King of everything. He said it was no accident that He died on the cross — and that He'd come back from death. Paul, Silas and their friend Timothy had to leave Thessalonica and split up because of the trouble from the violent mob. When they met up again, Paul found out how the young Thess' Christians were doing, and decided to drop them a line...

 **Read 1 Thessalonians 1 v 1–3**

- ▷ *What should inspire growing Christians to work hard for God and stick with it? (v3)*

It's important to pray for other Christians, thanking God for them and asking Him to help them grow in their faith. Verse 3 also challenges our motives for serving God. Do you do good stuff to look impressive? Is it just duty? Or does your service spring from faith, hope and love?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God to change your heart so you serve Him for the right reasons. Ask Him to help your hard work spring from faith in Him, love for Him and the certain hope of eternity with Jesus.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Serve God for the right reasons.

 **TAKE IT FURTHER**

Praytime — turn to page 108.





2

Word power

Thessalonica was a tough place to be a Christian. Many other gods were worshipped, and much false religion was taught. And the Jews persecuted anyone who publicly followed Christ. And you think you've got it tough.

Read 1 Thess 1 v 4–6

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- How does Paul describe these believers? (v4)*
- How did the gospel message reach them? (v5)*
- How did they receive it? (v6)*

Christians today share in the Thessalonians' experience. All believers have been chosen by God and are loved by Him. The message of Jesus comes to us with words (explaining the gospel), with power (from God, challenging us), with the Holy Spirit (helping us understand it) and with conviction (from people convinced of the gospel). We should try to live like those who shared the gospel with us, and receive it with joy.

Read verses 7–10

- What was remarkable about these Christians? (v8)*

How should Christians' lives change? (v9)

What should Christians be doing now? (v10)

Verse 10 mentions God's wrath. He's angry with people for turning away from Him. But v10 also says that those who trust in Jesus will be rescued from God's future judgment. Great news!

GET ON WITH IT

How can the Lord's message ring out (v8) from you?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God to help you turn away from the idols in your life; and to shout out His message all around you; and to wait and be ready for Jesus' return.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Imitation Engage on page 108.



3

Fair share

Paul and Silas had fled from Thessalonica fearing for their lives. But it wasn't a hit-and-run gospel attack from Paul. He stayed in touch with the Christians in that city, encouraging them and seeing them grow in their faith.

Read 1 Thess 2 v 1–6

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *How was Paul able to share the gospel in such hostile circumstances? (v2)*
- ▷ *What shouldn't we do when we share the gospel? (v3–5)*
- ▷ *What should be our motive? (v4)*

Talking to people about Jesus can often be a tricky task in the face of angry opposition. We shouldn't be tempted to resort to trickery or flattery. We must tell it how it is, doing it to please God, not out of selfish motives.

Read verses 7–12

- ▷ *What did Paul and friends do while in Thessalonica? (v8–9)*
- ▷ *How did they treat the people they met? (v7, v11)*
- ▷ *What did this involve? (v12)*

As Christians, we have a responsibility to share the gospel — the good news about Jesus. That doesn't merely mean talking about Jesus: we must also live in a way that honours God (v10). We shouldn't bash people over the head with Bible truths, but be loving and caring towards them. Sharing our lives with them, as well as the gospel. Being a Christian is a whole lifestyle — living for God — it's not hit-and-run Bible bashing. God wants us to comfort people and encourage them to live for Him (v12).

GET ON WITH IT

- ▷ *How will you change the way you share the gospel and the way you behave around non-Christians?*
- ▷ *Who will you comfort, encourage, & share your life with this week?*

THE BOTTOM LINE

It's all about pleasing God, not making a name for ourselves.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Get your fair share on page 108.



4

Word's worth

“I’m scared of sharing my faith with people. Why should anyone listen to my words and beliefs?”
The great news is that it’s not our words that bring people to Jesus...

Read 1 Thess 2 v 13–14

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *What did these guys recognise about the message Paul gave them? (v13)*
- ▷ *What’s the proof they’d accepted the truth about Jesus? (v14)*

It’s not our words that change people’s lives. It’s true that God can use us to do amazing things. But it’s His word — the awesome message of Jesus — that changes lives, not anything we do.

If someone truly accepts the gospel, we’ll see it at work in their lives. We’ll see them living for God, just as other believers do.

Read verses 14–16

- ▷ *What did these enemies of God do? (v14–16)*
- ▷ *What were they trying to stop? (v16)*

▷ *Would God tolerate this?*

The enemy can seem terrifying at times. Satan inspired a group of Jews to kill Jesus; he stirred up people to destroy the church in Thessalonica; and he wants to stop you from spreading the gospel. But God’s in control — His punishment (wrath) will come to anyone who fights against the gospel (v16). When opposition seems too much for us, we must remember that God is on our side and He will defeat His enemies.

THINK IT THROUGH

- ▷ *How do v13–16 encourage you?*
- ▷ *How will this affect the way you share the gospel?*

THE BOTTOM LINE

It’s not down to us; it’s God who changes lives and punishes sin.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Words of wrath on page 108.



5

Missing people

Is there anyone you're far away from, who you wish you could spend more time with? Paul missed these young Christians and wished he was with them.

Read 1 Thess 2 v 17–20

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *Why was Paul so keen on visiting these believers? (v19–20)*
- ▷ *What stopped him? (v18)*

Paul suffered loads for spreading the message about Jesus. But he knew it was more than worth it — he would be rewarded with eternal life with Jesus. And he took great joy in knowing these Christians in Thessalonica would share in it too, despite all the odds against them.

Read 1 Thess 3 v 1–5

- ▷ *Why did Paul send Timothy to them? (v2–3)*
- ▷ *Why shouldn't they worry about Paul? (v3–4)*
- ▷ *What had Paul been worried about? (v5)*

When someone becomes a Christian,

we can't just leave them to it and expect them to grow and mature. Young Christians need to be encouraged, taught and helped through tough times, so they grow and aren't tempted away from Jesus.

GET ON WITH IT

- ▷ *Which younger Christians will you get alongside and encourage?*
- ▷ *Which older Christian can you ask to do the same for you?*

It's no good simply hoping for the best, or leaving it to God to look after new Christians. If we care like Paul, we won't be able to rest until we're sure all is well.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Spend time praying for young Christians you know. How about sending them an encouraging email or visiting them?

TAKE IT FURTHER

Get emotional on page 108.



6

Thessalonian thrill

Do you pray much? What do you pray about? Who do you pray for? How often do you pray for other Christians? It's time for some prayer pointers from Paul.

Read 1 Thess 3 v 6–13

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *What encouraged Paul? (v7)*
- ▷ *What made him happy? (v9)*
- ▷ *What two things did he long to do? (v10)*

Paul and his friends were so encouraged to hear how the Christians in Thessalonica were growing in faith, despite facing great opposition. The news breathed new life into Paul, Timothy and the others (v8). They wanted to visit these guys and help them grow even more in their faith.

THINK IT THROUGH

- ▷ *Are you pleased and encouraged when you hear about other Christians doing well?*
- ▷ *Or do you get jealous or just not care?*

Read verses 11–13

- ▷ *What does Paul pray for these Christians?*
v12:
v13:

PRAY ABOUT IT

Paul prays that he'll be able to meet and encourage those Christians. He asks God to make these guys overflow with love for each other. And he prays they'll be strengthened and become more holy.

Below, list several Christians you know. Include some who live far away and some you don't get along with:

-
-
-
-
-

Use v11–13 to start you off praying for each one of them in turn.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Visiting time on page 109.



7

Let's talk about, umm, thingy

Sex. Christians rarely talk about it. We tend to blush and brush it under the carpet, just assuming we all behave sex-wise. But sex stuff causes problems for Christians too, and Paul knew it.

Read 1 Thess 4 v 1–8

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What should we be aiming for? (v1, v7)*
- ▶ *What help does God give us? (v8)*

Sexual self-control isn't easy, but we're not on our own — God's Spirit lives in all believers, helping them to please Him.

- ▶ *Why should we bother? (v3a)*
- ▶ *What does God expect us to do? (v4)*
- ▶ *Who else can sexual sin affect? (v6)*
- ▶ *What's the bad news for those who disobey and reject God? (v6)*

It's time to get honest with yourself and with God...

GET ON WITH IT

- ▶ *How's your self-control?*
- ▶ *When it comes to sex, what areas do you struggle with? Porn? Lustful thoughts or actions?*

- ▶ *How do the things you say dishonour God, in the area of sex?*
- ▶ *How do your attitudes to sex and relationships need to change?*
- ▶ *Be honest — what do you need to sort out?*

TALK IT OVER

If you do have a problem you want to deal with, you should talk to someone. An older Christian or a Christian friend who can help you and who will challenge you and ask how you're getting along. Yes, it's embarrassing, but it's essential.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Time to talk these things over with God, being open, honest and asking for His help. And pray for friends who struggle too.

THE BOTTOM LINE

"Avoid sexual immorality" (v3)

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

More sex talk on page 109.



8

More love, less noise!

**How good are you at loving other Christians?
Do you live a quiet life or are you always making
yourself look good? Do you work hard?
Do non-believers respect you for the way you live?**

Read 1 Thess 4 v 9–10

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *What were these Christians great at? (v9)*
- ▷ *Yet what does Paul say they should do? (v10)*

Whether you're great at showing love to others, or rubbish at it... you can never do it too much. We can always be more loving — in our words, actions and even thoughts.

GET ON WITH IT

- ▷ *Who do you need to be more loving towards?*

- ▷ *So what are you going to do?*

Read verses 11–12

- ▷ *What two surprising ambitions does Paul say they should have?*
- ▷ *Why should they aim for these things?*

It seems that these Christians were so excited about Jesus returning, they'd stopped working, got lazy, became annoyingly loud and were being busybodies! Wealthy Greeks often gave up manual work. But Paul said this was dangerous. They should stop poking their noses into other people's business and work hard to win the respect of outsiders to Christianity.

PRAY ABOUT IT

What has God challenged you about today? Talk it over with Him now.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Love others and work hard so God gets the glory.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

More stuff on page 109.





9

Back to the future

Are you excited about the future? Paul was! Check out how excited he got when talking about the most important event in the future — the second coming of Jesus Christ.

For the church in Thessalonica, the explanation about what was going to happen couldn't come soon enough. They were worried about their Christian friends who'd died. Where were they exactly? What would happen to them when Jesus returned? Paul now gives them, and us, a clear view of what's to come. To learn what the future holds, we must get back to the Bible.

Read 1 Thess 4 v 13–14

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *What happened to Jesus?*
- ▷ *So what does this mean for Christians who have died? (v14)*

Notice the great way he describes them — they're asleep in Jesus. There is no need to grieve over them as you would unbelievers, for they are totally safe with their Saviour. And their resurrection is just as certain as Jesus' own, because they're "in Jesus".

Read verses 15–18

- ▷ *What will happen when Jesus returns? (v16–17)*
- ▷ *What's the incredible result for Christians? (end of v17)*
- ▷ *What should we do with this knowledge? (v18)*

People have different opinions about what will happen when Jesus returns and what exactly will happen before then. But we shouldn't worry about that — if it was vital to know, the Bible would make it clear to us. We do know that it will be spectacular (v16). The most important fact is that Jesus will gather all believers and they'll be with Him forever (v17) That's worth shouting about!

GET ON WITH IT

- ▷ *How will you encourage Christian friends with these verses?*

TAKE IT FURTHER

Face death on page 109.