

## Small Group Bible Study: 1 Thessalonians

### **Week 1: Opening Question: What did God use to get your attention and expose you to the message of the Gospel?**

#### **Background:**

Paul went to visit Thessalonica around 49 A.D. The city was crucial to the Roman Empire and almost became the capital of the world because of the waterways that run into it, and the amount of trade & commerce that happened there. Paul, Silas & Timothy led the charge as they shared the gospel to the people in Thessalonica. Other than sharing the message of Christ, they were there to encourage the believers and plant the church. The background of the church can be read in Acts 17:1-9.

Paul's letter (with help from Silas & Timothy) gives the new believers some guidance on holy living, having hope for the future, and encouragement through the suffering and persecution they were facing.

### **Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (Other scriptures to read – Acts 17:1-9)**

#### **Questions:**

- 1- In verse 2, Paul says that they always thank God for them continually and pray for them persistently. Why does this affect their relationship with the people of Thessalonica? How could constant prayer affect your relationship with friends or people who you may have a rough relationship with?
  
- 2- In verse 3, Paul writes "We remember before God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."
  - a. What are "works" and how do they produce faith?
  - b. What is "labor" and how is it affected by love?
  - c. Why does hope build endurance?
  
- 3- In verses 4,5 Paul describes how the message of the gospel came to them.
  - a. What is the message of the gospel? (Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Ephesians 2:1-10)
  - b. How was the message delivered?
  - c. Guilt makes us run away from God and conviction makes us run towards Him. Why is that important to remember?
  
- 4- What happens next in verses 6-8?
  - a. Would it be good if someone imitated you? Why or why not?
  - b. Is there a difference between what Christians and Non Christians think of you?
  - c. How can you be a model to others so that your faith becomes known everywhere?
  
- 5- What can change in you to become a better witness to who Christ is?

#### **Prayer focus:**

Conviction from the Spirit, being a better model of who Christ is, being defined by faith, hope, & love, staying sensitive to how God is speaking to you

**Week 2: Opening Question – Who do you have in your life that you have a deep amount of affection for?**

Starting here in chapter 2 Paul is defending his actions and character. He has come under attack by those who opposed the message of Jesus and because Paul deeply cares for the people he is moved to defend himself.

**Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16**

**Questions:**

- 1- Why would Paul want to point back to the results that happened from their visit?
  - a. Why is it important for us to reflect on some of the ways we've seen God produce results in our lives?
  
- 2- In verse 3 & 4 Paul points to their motives. What were they trying to accomplish?
  - a. What are some ways that we can have impure motives in Christian ministry?
  - b. Why is it critical that we live to please God and not people? What happens when we try to please people?
  - c. Why does living for God and not people bring freedom?
  - d. What areas in your life are "bound up" by living for people?
  
- 3- In the first 6 verses Paul centers everything around the fact that they worship God and God alone. This is what shapes them and that is why when put to the test they pass.
  - a. Do you feel like God is the one who is shaping you or is it something/someone else?
  
- 4- In verses 7-12 Paul uses the analogy of a Mother and Father.
  - a. What are characteristics of a good Mother and Father?
  - b. How do those characteristics play into caring for people in the right way?
  - c. Have you ever experienced this with people in a Christian ministry?
  
- 5- What effect does the Word of God have on us if we believe it to be true and not just from humans? (yes it was written by humans with their particular style, but was inspired by God).
  - a. How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 when it comes to studying God's word?
  - b. Application of God's Word is critical. Why? How have you applied it in your own life?
  
- 6- Who are the people in your life right now that need some care and attention from you?

**Prayer Focus:**

Specific friends or family to witness to, areas of people pleasing that you have, accountability for studying God's word

**Week 3: Opening Question – When was the last time you were away from someone you really cared about? Describe your emotions.**

Paul continues to show his deep love and affection for the Thessalonians. He begins to describe what they were going through emotionally and how much it weighed on them. Paul and his crew of people were committed to them.

**Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13**

**Questions:**

- 1- What were some of the emotions that Paul felt for the Thessalonians? What actions did he take to care for them?
  - a. What does it take to be committed to people like this?
  - b. Are there people in your life that you are committed to?
  - c. Why is it critical that those who come into a Christian ministry feel like the believers are committed to them?
  - d. Why does caring for people strengthen yourself as well?
  
- 2- Paul lays out some concerns as to why he felt things could've gotten unsettled while they were gone. What were those concerns?
  - a. In v 18 and then in 3:5 he mentions Satan/tempter. Why do you think Satan "blocked" him? Why was he concerned with temptation?
  - b. How does temptation affect you? What are some of the biggest ways Satan tempts you?
  - c. When do you feel most tempted and what is your defense? (read Ephesians 6, Psalm 119:11, Psalm 25:15, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Proverbs 4:14,15, Matthew 5:29, Colossians 3:2)
  
- 3- In verse 19,20 Paul says that they are their hope, joy, crown when Jesus comes. What does he mean by that? (hint: Think about the Great Commission in Matthew 28).
  - a. Do you have anyone in your life that you feel the same way about?
  - b. If not, why should we long for that?
  
- 4- In 3:8, Paul says "Now we really live."
  - a. What makes him say that?
  - b. Why do the lives of the Thessalonians encourage them so much?
  
- 5- Why does Timothy's report encourage Paul?
  - a. How can you be encouraged by other people? What steps can you take to make that happen more frequently?
  
- 6- How does Paul pray for the Thessalonians in 3:10-14?

**Prayer Focus:**

Using the answers to question 6, pray the same way for our community.

**Week 4: Opening Question: In what ways have your personal decisions changed because of your desire to follow Christ?**

Throughout the U.S. Christians have become more known for what we preach than what we actually do. Right or wrong that perception is still there and we shouldn't be ok with that. As we read some of the history of the early church one of the big differences that we see in comparison to today is that Christians were changing culture by the way they were living out their faith for everyone to see. Paul writes to the Thessalonians that it is God's will for them to be sanctified, which means becoming more holy/righteous. As this happens in them through the work of the Spirit, he urges them to continue to push themselves to love more and more, to work hard, earn respect and be known for humility and meekness.

**Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12**

**Questions:**

- 1- Why does Paul's tone seem to change in this chapter?
  - a. Is it ok to be a little more harsh some times? Where is the line that you would draw on that?
  - b. Is there a difference with how you talk with a believer vs a non believer? Why?
  
- 2- Paul says that they have instructed them how to please God. Why is it a good idea to live a life that is pleasing to God?
  - a. What would change if you did that in every single area of your life?
  - b. What happens when we "get off course?"
  - c. Who do you have in your life that will help pull you back in? Why is it tough to build relationships with people that you can have that type of accountability?
  
- 3- In verses 3-8 Paul is addressing a clear issue within the community which is their sexual behavior. What commands does he give them?
  - a. Why is it important that Christians have a high standard when it comes to their sexuality? (Also read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20)
  - b. What boundaries do you have set up in your life to keep you away from making mistakes? Is it worth taking the steps to establish boundaries?
  - c. Why do you think God, the creator of sex (this is important), wants his people to wait?
  - d. Verse 8 is critical to our understanding of obedience. Why?
  
- 4- What does Paul want the Thessalonians to be like? (vs 11,12) Why was he telling them to act like this?
  - a. Why would laziness and overly relying on the kindness of others effect how non-believers look at believers?
  - b. What things are important to earn the respect of non believers?
  - c. How do you prevent yourself from compromising?

**Prayer focus:**

Read Colossians 3:12-17 and pray through each characteristic of a Christian

**Week 5: Opening Question- Have you ever had someone close to you pass away?  
What were some of your questions/thoughts/emotions?**

It is never easy when someone passes away. So many different emotions and questions can run through our minds. It is comforting when we know where someone stands in their faith but when there is uncertainty it becomes a whole different story. The Thessalonians were no different. They became very concerned with what happens when someone dies. Do they miss out on the Jesus coming back? Will I ever see the again? What do I do about my anger or mourning? All great questions to which Paul tries to answer.

**Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

**Questions:**

- 1- What does Paul say about mourning?
  - a. Is it ok for Christians to mourn? Did Jesus ever mourn? (John 11)
  - b. Why is the mourning of a Christian different? Why does hope matter?
  
- 2- What does Paul say is going to happen when Jesus comes again?
  - a. The Bible leaves out some details about his coming back but why is it important to know the details that are given?
  - b. Why does that hope change how we think about death and how we think about the present as well?
  
- 3- Why do you think the Thessalonians might have been upset that their friends/family would not have experienced the second coming of Jesus?
  
- 4- What are some other beliefs about the afterlife? How is the Christian view different?
  
- 5- Churches have split over “End times” discussions. Why is that a problem? What should all believers be unified on when it comes to Jesus coming back?

**Prayer Focus:**

Those who are grieving, those who struggle with fear, worry, opportunities to share hope of Jesus

**Week 6: Opening Question – Are there things that are “unknown” that make you scared/concerned/excited when thinking about what happens in the afterlife?**

The unknown can be a scary thing. A random noise that happens late at night can cause your heart to beat out of your chest. Some people when discussing their faith may even say, “When I’m about to die, I’ll make sure I’m right with God.” If you could prepare for everything because you know when things would happen life would be pretty boring wouldn’t it? The Thessalonians thought that they could be better prepared for the judgment of Christ if they could just know when it was going to happen.

**Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

**Questions:**

- 1- What is Paul addressing in this passage with the Thessalonians?
- 2- How does Paul describe what the coming of Jesus will be like?
  - a. Why do those descriptions matter?
- 3- In what ways are we “children of the light?”
  - a. How do your decisions differ from someone who is not in the “light?”
- 4- In vs 8 what does Paul describe as our defense?
  - a. Why are faith and love our breastplate?
  - b. Why does salvation give us hope?
  - c. How is the hope of our salvation different than other religions? (hint: Think Resurrection)
    - i. Why is this critical in the understanding of the future & living in the present?
- 5- Paul frequently talks about encouragement. Why does he want believers to encourage each other? Why did the Thessalonians need encouragement?
  - a. What ways can you be an encouragement to others?
  - b. Do you have examples of how someone’s encouragement to you helped shape who you are?
  - c. Go around the group and say something encouraging to each person (if someone is new, obviously they are off the hook)

**Prayer Focus:**

Spend time being thankful for what God has done in your life, for the people that He has placed in your life

**Week 7: Opening Question – What is an ideal community? How have you experienced community like that?**

Paul ends his first letter to the Thessalonians by emphasizing what community actually looks like and why it is so important. Our communities should be shaped by the gospel message and as Jesus says in John 17:23, “Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” What non believers think of Jesus is directly related to what they see in the Christian communities around them. Paul knows this and has some very encouraging things to say to the Thessalonians.

**Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28**

**Questions:**

- 1- What are all of the characteristics Paul lays out for what a good community looks like?
  - a. Spend time discussing each one. How can you do these same things in our community?
- 2- Why is patience with the timid, weak, or idle so difficult? (v14)
  - a. What prohibits you from being patient with people?
- 3- In v 15 he says to not repay evil for evil. Why does “killing people with kindness” work so well for them and for us?
- 4- In what ways is it possible to “Quench the Spirit?”
  - a. How can you be more aware of this in your own life?
- 5- Verse 24 Paul says that He who calls you is? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Why is this incredibly comforting? Why should this make us feel secure?
- 6- Verse 25, Paul is asking for prayer.
  - a. What does this say about Paul?
  - b. What can we learn from this request?

**Prayer Focus:**

Seeing people through God’s eyes, sensitivity to the Spirit’s conviction, humility with what God is using you for