

1 THESSALONIANS

DISCUSSION GUIDE 1

ABOUT THIS SERIES

What do you do when you're persecuted for being a Christian?

Seventeen years after the resurrection of Jesus, the persecution of Christians became hostile in a city called Thessalonica. As they lost their livelihood and lost their lives, the followers of Jesus naturally started to question if the faith was worth the cost.

To encourage them, the Apostle Paul wrote them a letter to give them hope and perspective to their persecution. Today, this letter is known in your Bible as "1 Thessalonians". More than a historical document, 1 Thessalonians gives perspective to all Christians as they endure any hardships or persecution.

Join St. Mark for the next five weeks and explore 1 Thessalonians, one verse at a time, and discover timeless truths to give you hope today.

ITEMS NEEDED

☐ Bibles

CHECKLIST BEFORE YOUR GROUP ARRIVES

- | | | |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pray for your group | <input type="checkbox"/> Read through the Discussion Guide | <input type="checkbox"/> Refreshments (optional) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean meeting area | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean bathroom | <input type="checkbox"/> Crack front door |

OPENING (10 MIN)

After a general welcome, say: For today's icebreaker, let's ask—

HOW DID YOU TOUGH OUT THE COLD WEATHER WE'VE BEEN HAVING?

After a brief discussion, say: Persevering through cold weather is one thing, but in our series going verse-by-verse through the book of 1 Thessalonians, we're going to learn how to persevere when we are persecuted for our faith.

But before we get into all of that, let's pray.

OPENING PRAYER (1 MIN)

Host, lead the group in prayer, asking God to bless your time together.

PREPARING TO READ (5-10 MIN)

After a prayer, say: A little bit of backstory on the book of 1 Thessalonians: It's either the oldest or second oldest book of the New Testament, written about 17 years after the resurrection, so it gives a fascinating glimpse into the emerging theology of the early church. The Apostle Paul was only in town for three weeks before being forced to flee, but in that time he planted a church and raised up a pastor. But he was worried about the health of this new church, so he sent a young

man named Timothy to check on them. When Timothy came back with a good report, Paul immediately wrote this letter of encouragement to them.

Reading a book of the Bible verse-by-verse might be a new exercise for some of us, so let's not miss the obvious—

WHAT VALUE IS THERE FOR YOU IN READING THROUGH THE BIBLE VERSUS GOING TO A SECTION OF THE BIBLE FOR A SPECIFIC TOPIC?

After a discussion, say: One of the values of reading through the Bible is it asks questions of us that we might not normally ask ourselves. It's letting God set the agenda instead of ourselves. Today, the text is going to ask us three questions.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-3 (5-10 MIN)

Let's get started! Let's turn to 1 Thessalonians and read together.

CAN SOMEONE READ VERSES 1-3 ALOUD FOR US?

After the reading, say: Paul talks about how Jesus is the motivation for their labor, their work, and their endurance. Think about your labor, your work, and your energy for the task at hand.

FIRST QUESTION—IN WHATEVER YOU'RE LABORING FOR IN LIFE, WHAT IS THE MOTIVATION?

HOW DOES IT CHANGE THE WAY YOU LABOR IF YOU DO IT FOR JESUS?

1 THESSALONIANS 1:4-8 (5-10 MIN)

After a discussion, say: Let's keep reading.

CAN SOMEONE READ VERSES 4-8 ALOUD FOR THE GROUP?

After the reading, say: Here Paul talks about the example of the Thessalonians, and how they are imitators of him and imitators of Jesus. This poses our second question for us—

WHO WOULD OTHERS SAY YOU IMITATE? (PARENT, SIBLING, PERSONALITY, ETC.)

WHO IMITATES YOU?

WHAT IS REQUIRED IN ORDER FOR SOMEONE TO INFLUENCE SOMEONE ELSE?

HOW DOES IT CHANGE YOU IF YOU TRY TO IMITATE JESUS?

1 THESSALONIANS 1:9-10 (5-10 MIN)

After a discussion, say: Let's get to our third question as we wrap up this chapter.

CAN SOMEONE READ VERSES 9-10 ALOUD FOR THE GROUP?

After the reading, say: Here Paul talks about the Thessalonians before and after Jesus, and uses the word “idol”. It may not be a golden calf, but an idol is anything that sets itself above God, anything we make into the most important thing. Which leads to our third question—

IF YOU’RE COMFORTABLE SHARING, GIVEN THAT DEFINITION, WHAT ARE YOUR IDOLS? (IT MAY HELP BY RETHINKING IT—WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?)

THIS MIGHT BE A HARD QUESTION TO PICTURE, BUT WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO PLACE JESUS AHEAD OF THAT THING? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO TURN FROM THAT IDOL TO SERVE THE LIVING GOD?

After a discussion, say: One chapter, with barely more than a paragraph, but it posed three questions for us to ask. I hope today was helpful for you, and we’ll see what questions God asks of us as we go forward in this series.

CLOSING PRAYER (5 – 7 MIN)

After a discussion, say: Before we close today, let’s pray

ARE THERE ANY OTHER PRAYER REQUESTS?

Host, after taking prayer requests, close the group in prayer.