

## Kingdom of God

### Lesson 1 Leader Notes – Kingdom Church: Intro to 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Thessalonica was located on the Gulf of the Northern Aegean Sea. Originally, the city was the capital of Macedonia until 168 B.C. Paul visited Thessalonica around 49 A.D. and wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians sometime between 49-52 A.D. (Caleb accidentally misspoke in the video and said 49-52 B.C) The population was around 200,000 whereas the modern-day city, Thessaloniki, has a population of over 1 million people. Thessalonica was a significant city the Roman Empire for several reasons. First, Thessalonica was a free city, meaning the city was governed by the people. Second, it was a gulf city on the northern side of Greece that was known for its trade and trade routes. Third, though many people in the city were financially secure, Thessalonica was predominantly “middle class.” Finally, the city was religiously diverse as residents worshiped Egyptian gods, Roman gods, Northern Aegean Gulf gods, and more.

1. Would it be a good idea if someone imitated you (wanted to be exactly like you)? Why or why not? If not, are there areas of your life that others would benefit from imitating? If so, what are one or more of those areas?

Hey Life Group Leaders! Welcome to week 1 and the start of our new Life Group Video Series, “Kingdom of God” as we study through the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians! We hope that this series will be uplifting, challenging, and help you find your next step in your journey with God!

This week, you have seven questions coming up based the video lesson this week! Remember that these Leader Notes are to serve as a guide for further and deepening conversation with your Life Group, not as the answers! Enjoy this week’s discussion and always remember to ask an extra question such as “Why do you believe that?” to draw out some more conversation from your group members!

To start off this lesson, we have a personal question that everyone should be able to answer. It does take some honesty and humility to share. Some may be embarrassed and do not feel worthy of having other people imitate their actions and ways of conducting their lives. It may help if you, as the leader, are transparent and willing to share. This can be an incredibly helpful way to learn more about the people in your group. Make sure that your group feels the safety of sharing within the group. No snap judgments or quick fixes. Show grace as your group members are working through their salvation with fear and trembling (**Philippians 2:12**).

2. Ask someone in your group to read **Acts 17:1-9** (the background of the church in Thessalonica). Who are the main characters in this passage? What were Paul and his crew preaching? What was the conflict? How did God use this story for His glory?

**Acts 17:1-9** reads, *“When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.*

*But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all*

*defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go."*

The main characters are: Paul and his companions; Silas being the only companion named here. A man named Jason who probably allowed the group to stay at his home and use it for their Life Group to meet ;) Some Jews who joined Paul and Silas. Along with a large number of Greeks and prominent women. Other jealous Jews who formed a mob of wicked men from the marketplace. City officials. And of course, Jesus ... ;)

Paul and his crew were preaching and teaching from Scripture (that would be the Old Testament at that time) and explaining evidence that was proof of Jesus as the Messiah and his resurrection from the dead.

Some answers for the question regarding the conflict may include that there was jealousy by some of the Jews for some reason. It is probable that it was the Jewish leadership in the area who got the people (wicked men from the marketplace) riled up to start the riot. The Jewish leaders didn't refute the theology of Paul and Silas, but they were jealous of the popularity of these itinerant preachers. Their motives for causing the riot were rooted in personal jealousy, not doctrinal purity.

Some answers for this question may include that God's glory is seen in the fact that a church was started and grew, even after Paul and his companions were chased out of the city. Although we don't know much about Jason except that he evidently was the local host and sponsor of Paul and Silas; thus, he took the heat for all the problems. Jason is just one of many "unsung heroes" who faithfully played their part to help spread the gospel. Because of Jason's courage, Paul and Silas were able to minister more effectively, bringing glory to God. You may not receive much attention (in fact you may receive only grief) for your service for Christ. But God wants to use you. Lives will be changed because of your courage and faithfulness.

3. Some main themes that Paul wrote about in 1 & 2 Thessalonians were Christ's return, correct theology, encouraging believers who were suffering and being persecuted, working diligently, loving people well, and holy living. If you had to choose one of these 6 themes that you need to work on or grow in your understanding of, which would it be and why?

This is a good opportunity for everyone to share. This may be a tough question for some people to answer. It may help if you, as the leader, are transparent and willing to share. Give everyone some time to process and the room to share. Everyone will have differing answers and perspectives. Remember, no snap judgment or quick fixes. This can be a really great way to learn more about the people in your group. Remember to ask follow up questions and give encouraging feedback as people share.

4. A popular cult in Thessalonica worshiped a god known as Cabirus. This god was a representative of the working class and was based off of a young man who lived hundreds of years earlier. The young man was unjustly killed, and cult members believed he would return one day and reward his worshipers. What are the parallels you notice between Cabirus and Jesus? How might an understanding of Cabirus make it easier for the Thessalonians to believe in Jesus?

Some parallels include that both Jesus and Cabirus were unjustly killed. Jesus did raise from the dead and the cult members believed that Cabirus would raise from the dead. Jesus brings a "reward" of eternal life to all who believe. Followers of Cabirus also believed that a reward would come to them if they worked hard.

The people would have some familiarity with these parallels making it easier for them to understand what Paul was teaching them. Paul would share evidence as he reasoned from the Scriptures, identifying Jesus as Messiah and explaining the necessity of his death and resurrection. Knowing Paul and reading how he

surveyed different areas, like Athens, and their cultures/gods (**Acts 17:16-33**), he probably knew of Cabirus and would use examples to explain that Jesus was in fact, whom the people were actually waiting for, not Cabirus.

5. Read **1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:9; 3:2; 4:11; and 2 Thessalonians 3:10**. List the different things that Paul says about the idea of "work" or "labor" in these verses. Since the Thessalonian society valued "work" so much, how does Paul leverage the idea of "work" to connect with the Thessalonian believers?

**1 Thessalonians 1:3** reads, *"We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."*

**1 Thessalonians 2:9** reads, *"Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you."*

**1 Thessalonians 3:2** reads, *"We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith ..."*

**1 Thessalonians 4:11** reads, *"and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you ..."*

**2 Thessalonians 3:10** reads, *"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'"*

Some may include this list of "work" or "labor" from these verses:

Your work produced by faith

Your labor prompted by love

Your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ

Toil and hardship; we worked night and day  
Timothy ... our co-worker in God's service  
...work with your hands ...  
The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat

Paul leverages the idea of "work" to connect with the Thessalonian believers in a few different ways throughout these verses:

**1 Thessalonians 1:3** Here Paul commended the young Christians for their work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope as they stood firm through persecution.

**1 Thessalonians 2:9** Although Paul had a right to receive financial support from the people he taught, he supported himself as a tentmaker (**Acts 18:3**) so that he wouldn't be a burden to the new Thessalonian believers.

**1 Thessalonians 3:2** Because Paul could not return to Thessalonica (**1 Thessalonians 2:18**), he sent Timothy as his representative and co-worker in God's service. According to **Acts 17:10**, Paul left Thessalonica and went to Berea. When trouble broke out in Berea, some Christians took Paul to Athens, while Silas and Timothy stayed behind (**Acts 17:13-15**). Then Paul directed Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens. Later Paul sent Timothy to encourage the Thessalonian Christians to be strong in their faith in the face of persecution and other troubles.

**1 Thessalonians 4:11** There is more to Christian living than simply loving other Christians. We must be responsible in all areas of life. Some of the Thessalonian Christians had adopted a life of idleness, depending on others for handouts. Some Greeks looked down on manual labor. So, Paul told the Thessalonians to work hard and live a quiet life. You can't be effective in sharing your faith with others if they don't respect you. Whatever you do, do it faithfully and be a positive force in society.

**2 Thessalonians 3:10** Paul was writing here about the person who is lazy. Paul explained that when he and his companions were in Thessalonica, they worked hard, buying what they needed rather than becoming a burden to any of the believers. There's a difference between leisure and laziness. Relaxation and recreation provide a necessary and much needed balance to our lives; but when it is time to work, Christians are to be first to step up. Some people in the Thessalonian church were falsely teaching that because Christ would return any day, people should set aside their responsibilities, quit work, do no future planning, and just wait for the Lord. But their lack of activity only led them into sin. They became a burden to the church, which was supporting them; they wasted time that could have been used for helping others; and they became "busybodies."

6. How well do you function under pressure? How do you handle your emotions during suffering?

This is another good opportunity for everyone to share. This is kind of a "get to know you" question although it is digging a little deeper personally. Once again, it may help if you, as the leader, are transparent and willing to share. This can be a fun way to share stories and learn more about the people in your group. Give everyone some time to process and the room to share. Everyone will have differing answers and perspectives. Regardless of the answers, remember, no snap judgment or quick fixes.

7. The title "Lord Jesus" appears 11 times in 1 Thessalonians and 12 times in 2 Thessalonians. In your opinion, why does Paul use this title for Jesus instead of other titles? What might Paul's title for Jesus tell us about 1 & 2 Thessalonians?

Some answers may include that Paul was trying to draw a close connection between the Father and the Son, pointing to the Trinitarian relationship. There is a vital union and living relationship that Christians have with the Father and the

Son. Using the term *Lord Jesus* repeatedly would further emphasize the authority that Jesus has, giving reason as to why believers are to submit to him. His sovereignty is over all, including the Roman Empire and other gods that were worshiped in the region. According to the story in **Acts 17**, one of the issues that Jewish leadership brought up in complaint of Paul and his companions was that they were “*defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus. When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil*” (**Acts 17: 7-8**). Clearly they were concerned about who has the authority over whom. The term *Lord Jesus* indicates authority, dominion, power, and sovereignty. Paul wanted to emphasize to his young church that the Lord Jesus reigns in all believers and has the authority over all.

Remember to ask for prayer requests and close your group in prayer. Encourage one another to take steps, regardless of how small, toward Jesus and his kingdom.

### **Questions and Ideas to Reflect on This Week:**

- This week, try to read 1 Thessalonians two or three times in different translations (NIV, ESV, NLT, NCV, The Message, NKJV, NASB, etc.)
- Try memorizing 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6.
- Take some time to reflect and write down what you hope to gain from this series.