

# Kingdom of God

## Lesson 2 Leader Notes

### Kingdom Lives: 1 Thessalonians 1

1. Share about a time when God gave you the strength to accomplish a task or have a difficult conversation.

Hey Life Group Leaders! Welcome to week 2 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 eight 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. Some may be embarrassed and do not feel that they have a good story to share. It may help if you, as the leader, are transparent and willing to share. This process of sharing 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. Read **1 Thessalonians 1:2-3**. Paul discusses the relationship between:

- Works & Faith
- Love & Labor
- Endurance & Hope

According to these verses, what and/or who should prompt us to pray and thank God? How does this differ from the majority of prayer requests that we hear today?

**1 Thessalonians 1:2-3** reads, *“We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. 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.*

The triad of faith, hope, and love is found often in the New Testament (Romans 5:2-5; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5-6 to name a few of many). We also often read and have experienced that faith produces action (Romans 1:5; Galatians 5:6 James 2:14-26). Hope is not

unfounded wishful thinking, but firm confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ and his return. The three pairs of words seem to flow from one another. You may discuss the logical progression of one word from the other as Paul lists them in verses 2-3.

Paul begins his letter with a prayer for his friends. He prays that their faith will have “work” in it; he means faith as an event that happens. He prays for love in their lives that toils. He prays for hope that stays and holds out and endures. All of this prayer is possible because of God’s love, which made us his own before we loved or hoped or believed. This is the theme of grace that dominated the opening of the letter.

Some answers may include that other than Jesus, no one has ever prayed the “perfect prayer.” In every century of history, people have struggled with prayers. Sometimes we often default to a wish list of things we need or want God to take care of or do for us. Sometimes we just vent to him that we’re frustrated with life. It often seems that our prayers are less about talking with a beloved friend and confidant and more about a honey-do list for God. Maybe suggest and discuss reasons why people could struggle with prayer— emotions, lack of understanding as to how to pray, unrealistic expectations from others or self-imposed, stress, not growing in a close relationship with Jesus, etc.

3. Notice in **verse 4**, Paul did not write, “For we know, brothers and sisters chosen by God, that he has loved you.” In your opinion, why did Paul place the word “loved” before the word “chosen”?

**1 Thessalonians 1:4** reads, *“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you”*

Of course, it does matter which translation you use, as some translations will have the order different. However, the concept still stands. If “chosen” precedes “love” then we’d have even more reason to keep trying to prove ourselves to God so that we don’t get “unchosen.” However, “love” comes before “chosen” because God unconditionally loves believers. And because love comes first, that love doesn’t leave. That also means that we belong, have a family, are not alone, etc.

4. In **verses 4-7**, in more than one way, Paul says the Thessalonian believers set a good example. What 2 words in verses 6-7 does Paul use to describe the Thessalonians as setting a good example? How are those 2 words similar and how are they different? How did the Thessalonians set a good example?

**1 Thessalonians 1:4-7** reads, *“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe*

*suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."*

The two words are "imitators" (vs. 6) and "model" (vs. 7)

For the second part of this question, some answers may include the definitions of the two words:

**Imitator** – In the original Greek, the word "imitator" that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 means "to mimic" or "someone who does what another person does."

**Model** – In the original Greek, the word "model" that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 means "a mark made as the result of a blow or pressure" or "an object which has been formed to resemble a person, god, animal, etc."

Paul uses the words "imitate/imitator" and "model" elsewhere:

In the following chapter, Paul asks the Thessalonians to imitate God (1 Thessalonians 2:14). In 1 Corinthians 4:16, Paul asks the Corinthians to imitate him. Later in 1 Corinthians 11:1, the NIV translates the same Greek word for "imitate" as "example" ("follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"). Paul tells the believers in Ephesus to follow God's example (Ephesians 5:1).

The same Greek word that the NIV translates as "model" in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 is translated as "made to look like" in Romans 1:23. In this verse, the word refers to idols. It also refers to "idols" in Acts 7:43; 17:43; 1 Corinthians 12:2. Also, Paul asks believers to "model" after him (1 Corinthians 10:32-33 and 2 Thessalonians 3:7). The original word for "model" is translated as "image" in Matthew 22:20. The Apostle John asks us not to imitate evil in 3 John 1:11. The author of Hebrews tells us to imitate our godly leaders (Hebrews 6:12; 13:7).

For the last part of this question, some answers may include an example of godly imitating and a godly model is personified in Philippians 2:4-11 as Paul describes Jesus' willingness to die, his death, and his triumph over death to the glory of God.

To illustrate the difference of model and imitate, you could point out some of the following: Many people use "imitate" as a verb and "model" as a noun ... so one word could represent "what we do" and the other word could insinuate "who we are."

5. Paul says in **verse 6** that the Thessalonians joyfully welcomed Jesus' message in the midst of severe suffering. Have you ever been joyful during a painful season? If so, what happened? How were you able to stay joyful? What lessons did you learn from the experience?

**1 Thessalonians 1:6** reads, *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."*

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 good 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.

6. According to **verses 8-9**, what was the result of their good example? From your personal life, who comes to mind when you think of Christians who set a good example?

**1 Thessalonians 1:8-9** reads, *"The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God"*

Some answers may include that the message of Christ went beyond their geographical location and into the world. The example of the Thessalonian believers even made others brag on them.

The second part of this question is another good opportunity for everyone to share. Give everyone some time to process and the room to share. Some answers may include information about someone they consider a spiritual mentor. It could be someone they know or someone they've never met (an author, a preacher they listen to on a podcast, etc.). Once again, everyone will have differing answers and perspectives. Regardless of the answers, remember, no snap judgment or quick fixes.

7. Read the following verses where Paul writes about God's wrath: **Romans 2:8; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16**. According to these verses, why is God's wrath coming?

**Romans 2:8** reads, *"But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."*

**Ephesians 5:6** reads, *"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."*

**Colossians 3:5-6** reads, *"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."*

**1 Thessalonians 2:14-16** reads, *"For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last."*

Some reasons as to why God's wrath is coming may include those that are self-seeking, rejecting the truth, and following evil; Deception with empty words and disobedience; Whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry; Those that heap up their sins to the limit. There might also be reasons that Paul did not specifically write but can be insinuated from what Paul says in the passage or the verses before and after the passage. Take some time to read more context of these verses and discuss what your group members discover!

8. Read **1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9**. How did Jesus rescue believers from God's wrath? In your opinion, what's the difference between God's wrath and God's discipline?

**1 Thessalonians 1:10** reads, *"and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."*

**1 Thessalonians 5:9** reads, *"For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Some answers may include that by sacrificing his life on the cross, Jesus bore the weight of our sins and the consequences for our sins. His resurrection conquered those sins and consequences as he defeated death, putting an end to our need to bear the weight of sin and death that Jesus bore for us. Therefore, Christians will never face the wrath of God. However, Christians may experience the discipline of God just like a loving parent disciplines a child.

The second part of this question is another good opportunity for everyone to share. Some answers may include that the idea of "wrath" is all about destruction and punishment, whereas "discipline" is about correcting character and strengthening the person. It is asking for your opinion, but make sure to listen carefully as to how your group members are answering this and by what perspective they are arriving at their opinions. Are they using a biblical perspective or one that leans away from biblical perspective? How might you know either way? This has the potential to be very thought provoking and initiate a lot of discussion. Once again, 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. Regardless of the answers, remember, no snap judgment or quick fixes, although some gentle course correction may be appropriate. ;)

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:**

- Reflect on any of the above questions that your group didn't get a chance to address.
- Try reading 1 Thessalonians 1 once a day this week in a different Bible version each day.

- Read all of the following verses where Paul either prays or talks about prayer: Acts 16:25-26; Romans 1:8-11; 8:26-27; 12:12; 15:30-33; 2 Corinthians 1:11; 13:7-9; Philippians 1:9-11; 4:6-7; Ephesians 1:16-21; 3:14-19; 6:18-20; Colossians 4:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Timothy 2:1-5; Philemon 1:6.
- Now, reflect on the following questions:  
What caused Paul to pray?  
What common themes could you identify in these verses?  
How might these verses help your prayer life to improve?
- Which of the following areas do you need to grow?  
Works & Faith  
Love & Labor  
Endurance & Hope.