

**1 Thessalonians 3:1 - 4:12**

**Living to please God – Leaders version**

**For a one hour study, just do the starred \* questions**

**Check in** – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

1. What do you remember from the last study we did?

**What does the passage say and mean?**

60 minutes

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5. Why did Paul send Timothy to the Thessalonians and how would that have helped?

*Paul couldn't get there himself and he knew that the young church was being persecuted. He sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage them in their faith because he was concerned that they would be unsettled in their faith by the pressure.*

\*3. What does Paul say about the persecution of Christians in v3-4 and how does that make you feel?

*He says that we were destined for it. Allow the group to think about what that means for all believers.*

Questions 4-6 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

\*4. **SDL** Read Mark 8:34. What does it mean to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus?

- Deny self – *put Jesus (and others) before yourself. It's not to deny that you exist! It's to acknowledge that you are not number 1 in your own life.*
- Take up your cross – *to be aware of the reality of persecution and possibility of death because of their faith in Jesus. Jesus' original hearers only heard one thing when they heard 'take up your cross' – they heard 'come and die'. The only purpose of a cross was as a method of execution.*

- **Follow** – *faith in Jesus is not a static thing, it's an ongoing journey of trust, growth and dependence on Jesus. As we follow Jesus, we will start to change, because he is changing us, from the inside out.*

\*5. **SDL** Which of these are you finding most difficult to do at the moment and why?

\*6. **SDL** How can you support other Christians in this prison when they are under pressure because of their faith?

*Help the group to come up with practical and relevant answers.*

7. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10. What report did Timothy bring of the Thessalonians and how did that make Paul feel?

*That they are standing firm in their faith and missing Paul and co too. This has encouraged Paul, who is still being persecuted and is missing them.*

\*8. Read 3:11-4:2. Why does it matter that Christians live in order to please God, rather than to please themselves?

*When we recognise that God is our King (and we are not), we desire to bring our lives under his authority. It's not about keeping the rules, but about pleasing our King. It's not because we're afraid of the consequences of disobeying, but because we love him and want to live his way. If we understand that living God's way is the best way, then we actively seek to bring our whole lives under his control. (That doesn't mean it's easy...) The outcome of living in order to please God is that 1. we please God (make sure people understand that this doesn't make him love us any more – he already loves us infinitely) and 2. other people see the witness of the change that Jesus has made in our lives.*

\*9. Read 4:3-8. What is God's will regarding our behaviour (v3) and why? (v7)

*Don't get caught up in defining sexual sins. Paul's point is about all forms of sexual immorality, so don't allow the group to point the finger at any particular variety.*

*God's will is that believers are sanctified – set apart, made holy. As our creator, God knows what is best for us. Everything he says about our behaviour is because he wants us to be who we were created to be and he wants the best for us. This means that God wants Christians to be different from unbelievers, and this is often not easy to hear or to implement.*

*NB v5-6 is not referring to homosexual activity. 'brother' in Greek means brother / sister, but does not translate this way directly into English. The passage is talking about respecting your marriage partner and not taking advantage of / abusing them (Stott 2009, p85).*

\*10. Read 4:8. When we reject the Bible's teaching, who does the Bible say we are really rejecting, and how does that make you feel? Why do you think it makes you feel this way?

*We are rejecting God, not man, when we reject the Bible's teaching. This statement is likely to make some of the group feel indignant, self-defensive, angry etc. Ask them to try to explain why they feel so prickly about being told that rejecting the Bible means that they are rejecting God's teaching.*

*Be careful here, rejecting God's teaching does not necessarily mean that we are rejecting God, rather that we are not prepared to live under his authority at the moment. This may change one day.*

*Make sure no-one gets the impression that their (sexual) behaviour means that God cannot accept them.*

11. Read 4:9-10. What is brotherly love?

*The love between Christians – it includes women too! It's talking about agape love – friendship, fellowship, caring, compassion – love with no expectations.*

12. Do you, as a group who study the Bible together, notice anything different about the way you relate to each other, compared to how you relate to other people on the wing?

*Help them to think about what is different and why they think this is.*

\*13. Read 4:11. What do you think Paul is getting at here?

*He's talking about getting on with life, not causing / getting into trouble, having an income from employment when possible. There was a problem in Thessalonica at the time with people not working because they thought Jesus would come back so soon. There was also a famine in AD51, and maybe people were relying on the support of the wealthy, rather than trying to get work of their own to support themselves.*

14. Why is this linked with winning the respect of outsiders (unbelievers) in v12?

*Presumably, this was a noticeably different lifestyle to that of the people around them, so it may have been a distinctly Christian lifestyle. Unbelievers would see the stability of such a lifestyle – an income, not getting into trouble, minding your own business etc. - and want to know what had happened to effect such a change.*

\*15. Why do you think Paul encourages the Christians to earn money to support themselves, rather than rely on other people?

*Work is not part of the fall, it's part of creation! See Genesis 1:26 and 1:28. It's not a bad thing, work is a good thing, it's one of the things we're designed for. Also, honest work can build self-respect and develop respect from others.*

16. Do you consider the Bible to be making unreasonable demands on your behaviour or to be showing you how to live in order to please God?

## **How can I live according to these truths in my life?**

20 minutes

\*1. Read 3:2 again. Why do we need someone to strengthen and encourage us in our faith? Who is that person / people for you, and who will it be when you are released?

*Think about why we should not be alone in our faith, and how fellowship strengthens us as we seek to follow Jesus, helps us to see where we're going wrong (both in doctrine and behaviour) and gives us a community to belong to. Help the group to think about how they will be supported in their faith when they are released / transferred and to make some practical plans / suggestions.*

\*2. How do you feel about the Bible's attitude to work and how does your current attitude to work line up with this?

*NB people's attitude to work may not be quite the same as their behaviour!! Ask the group about the work that they do in the prison and whether their attitude to it reflects God's glory.*

\*3. How might your behaviour start to change if you could see the Bible as God showing how to live in order to please him?

**Check out** – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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- Deny self –
- Take up your cross –
- Follow –

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