

BGCC Community Group Guide



Character of The Church

August 30th

The Evangelistic Church

1 Thessalonians 1

Main Idea: A gospel-sharing church is made up of people whose lives have been transformed by the gospel, whose joy remains rooted in Christ even through suffering, and whose words and actions naturally point others to Jesus.

Introduction: When the Gospel Gets Inside Us

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians begins with encouragement. This was a young church that had experienced persecution and suffering, yet something remarkable was happening: their faith was becoming known far beyond their own city.

Paul does not begin by telling them to become better evangelists or memorize a particular presentation. Instead, he points to what has already happened in them. They have received the gospel, the Holy Spirit has transformed them, they are imitating Christ, and their lives are now becoming a model for other believers.

The gospel had not simply become something they believed. It had become something that changed how they lived. That is the picture of a gospel-sharing church. The gospel comes **into** us, transforms us, and then begins to **ring out through** us. Before the gospel can ring out from us, it has to register with us.

Significance in the Biblical Story

1 Thessalonians gives us one of the clearest pictures in the New Testament of what happens when a church genuinely receives the gospel. The Thessalonians were living in a major center of commerce and travel, surrounded by people from many different places and backgrounds. There was no social media, no church advertising campaign, and no modern communication system. Yet Paul says their faith had become known everywhere. Why?

Because ordinary Christians were living ordinary lives in a different way. They had turned from idols to serve the true God. Their hope in Jesus gave them joy even in suffering. Their transformed lives made people curious, and their words gave them an opportunity to explain the hope they had.

The church did not spread the gospel primarily because a few professionals preached sermons. The gospel spread because ordinary believers lived changed lives among ordinary people.

Section 1 – The Gospel Transforms Us

1 Thessalonians 1:1–5

“Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.”

— 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Summary

Paul begins his letter by thanking God for the Thessalonians and reminding them that he continually prays for them. He identifies three things that characterized their lives: their work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance inspired by hope in Jesus Christ. *Their lives were different because the gospel had actually taken hold of them.*

Paul says the gospel came to them not simply in words, but in power through the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. They were hearing something completely different from the religious system they had known. Much of their culture was built around trying to earn the favor of their gods through sacrifices and religious practices. The gospel told them something radically different: **The work and persuading has already been done.**

They did not have to earn God's favor. Jesus had come, died for their sins, and risen again. God's grace was available to them because of what Christ had accomplished. That truth did not merely give them new information. It transformed them.

Paul also points to the way he and his companions lived among them. Their message was supported by their lives. They did not simply arrive, preach, and leave. The Thessalonians saw how Paul, Silas, and Timothy lived. They saw their character, their love, their suffering, and their devotion to Jesus. The gospel was demonstrated as well as proclaimed.

Group Question: Why is it important that the gospel came to the Thessalonians not only in words but also in the way Paul and the others lived?

Personal Relevance

The gospel is not simply information we agree with. It is good news that is meant to transform us. We can know the right words about Jesus while allowing very little of those truths to affect the way we live. But Paul describes something deeper. The gospel should affect the way we work, love, suffer, respond to people, handle conflict, make decisions, and view ourselves. Our lives should increasingly make sense because of Jesus.

How empty would it feel if, when someone looked at us, they saw an average-nothing-special person that was no different from an atheist? What is the point of Christ then?

Flow Question: What part of the gospel has most changed the way you think or live?

Reflection Question: Is there an area of your life where you know what the gospel says, but you have struggled to let that truth actually change you?

Section 2 – It Follows Jesus by Faithful Example

1 Thessalonians 1:6–7

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord... in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit.”

— 1 Thessalonians 1:6

Summary

Paul tells the Thessalonians that they became imitators of him and of the Lord. This does not mean Paul was telling them to become copies of Paul. His goal was for them to become copies of Jesus Jesus. Paul was simply pointing them toward the example of a life that was already trying to follow Christ. They saw Paul, Silas, and Timothy living for Jesus, and they wanted to live that way too.

This is one of the ways God grows His people. We learn by watching other believers faithfully follow Jesus. We see how they pray, how they respond when life becomes difficult, how they treat their families, how they forgive, how they serve, and how they respond when things do not go their way.

Paul's language reminds us that discipleship is not simply information transfer. Christianity is something we learn to live by seeing it lived out. But something even deeper was happening with the Thessalonians. They were not merely copying behaviors. The gospel had taken root in them, and those behaviors were becoming their own. They went from imitators to models.

Paul says they became a model to believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia. They received the gospel, watched it lived out, began living it themselves, and eventually became examples for others. This is one way how discipleship multiplies.

Group Question: Who is someone whose life has helped you understand what it looks like to follow Jesus? What did you see in their life that impacted you?

Personal Relevance

Every Christian is influencing someone. Someone is watching how we respond to suffering. Someone is watching how we treat our spouse. Someone is watching how we handle money, stress, conflict, disappointment, and success.

The question is not whether people are learning from us. The question is **what they are learning**. We do not need to have everything figured out before we can help someone else follow Jesus. We simply need to keep following Him ourselves.

A parent does not have to be a perfect Christian for their child to learn from them. In fact, they have no choice whether or not the child learns; they only choose what it is they want to teach. A mature believer does not have to know every theological answer to encourage a younger believer. We can say, "I am learning to follow Jesus, and you can follow along with me." The goal is never, "Be like me." The goal is, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

Flow Question: What are some ordinary ways Christians can model Jesus to the people around them?

Reflection Question: If someone closely watched your life for the next month, what would they learn about what it means to follow Jesus?

Section 3 – The Holy Spirit Gives Us Joy in Suffering

1 Thessalonians 1:6; Acts 17

"You welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."

— 1 Thessalonians 1:6

Summary

One of the most remarkable things about the Thessalonian church was not simply that they believed the gospel. It was that they continued to have joy even when following Jesus became difficult. Acts 17 tells us that their new faith brought persecution. They had turned away from the religious practices that had shaped their culture and their lives. They were no longer worshiping the idols around them. Their allegiance was now to Jesus. That decision had consequences.

Yet Paul says they welcomed the gospel with joy given by the Holy Spirit. This is part of the power of the gospel. The Holy Spirit gives believers a joy that circumstances cannot completely

take away. The world expects suffering to expose what is inside us. When everything is going well, it is easy to appear joyful, peaceful, and hopeful. But suffering has a way of revealing what we actually believe.

The Thessalonians were suffering because of Jesus, yet they still had joy in Jesus. That became a testimony. People around them could see that their faith was not simply something they claimed when life was easy. They had something that suffering could not take away.

Sometimes the gospel is heard most clearly not in what we say during our blessings, but in what the world sees when suffering takes some of those blessings away. The Thessalonians had a joy that made people ask questions.

Group Question: Why do you think joy in the middle of suffering can be such a powerful testimony to people who do not believe in Jesus?

Personal Relevance

A Christian is not promised a life without suffering. We are promised the presence of Christ through it. Our joy is not based on everything going the way we want. It is based on knowing that Jesus has saved us, loves us, is with us, and has secured our future.

That does not mean Christians pretend that suffering does not hurt. It means suffering does not get the final word. People around us may not read a Bible, listen to a sermon, or attend a church service. But they will watch us when we lose something, when we are disappointed, when someone hurts us, when our plans fall apart, or when life becomes difficult. What will they see?

Flow Question: What is the difference between pretending to be happy during suffering and having genuine joy rooted in Christ?

Reflection Question: Is there a current difficulty in your life where God may be inviting you to trust Him and find joy in Him rather than in your circumstances?

Section 4 – A Gospel-Sharing Church Lives and Speaks the Gospel

1 Thessalonians 1:7–10; 1 Peter 3:15–16

“The Lord's message rang out from you... your faith in God has become known everywhere.”

— 1 Thessalonians 1:8

Summary

The Thessalonians did not keep their faith to themselves. Paul says the Lord's message “rang out” from them. Their faith had become known throughout the surrounding regions to the point that Paul did not even need to tell other people what had happened in Thessalonica. They had already heard. How did that happen? These were ordinary people living ordinary lives.

Thessalonica was a major center of trade and travel. People were constantly coming and going. The Christians in the city had normal jobs, went to normal places, interacted with normal people, and had normal conversations. But they were different. They had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. They were waiting for Jesus, whom God had raised from the dead. Their lives had a completely different center.

And when people noticed the difference, they had a story to tell.

Paul gives us the basic shape of that story:

Who I was.

What Jesus did.

Who I am now.

What I am living for.

The Thessalonians did not need to be professional theologians. They simply needed to tell the truth about what Jesus had done. Matthew connected this directly with 1 Peter 3:15–16, where believers are told to always be prepared to give a reason for the hope they have, while doing so with gentleness and respect.

Jesus also gives the church this responsibility in the Great Commission:

“Go and make disciples of all nations.”

— Matthew 28:19

Sharing the gospel is not only the job of pastors, missionaries, or church staff. Paul was writing to **the church**. The gospel was spreading because ordinary believers were living transformed lives and talking about Jesus.

Group Question: Why do you think the Thessalonians' transformed lives made it easier for them to share the gospel with others?

Personal Relevance

You do not have to know every answer to every question someone might ask.

You do not have to be a theologian.

You do not have to be an adult.

You do not have to have a platform.

You simply need to know your story.

Who was I before Jesus?

What has Jesus done for me?

Who am I becoming because of Jesus?

Flow Question: What makes you most nervous about sharing your faith with someone? What might help you become more comfortable?

Reflection Question: Who is one person in your life who may be watching your life right now? How could you intentionally live and speak in a way that points them toward Jesus?

Conclusion

1 Thessalonians 1:8–10

Paul's description of the Thessalonian church gives us a picture of what a gospel-sharing church looks like.

1. They received the gospel, and the gospel transformed them.
2. They watched faithful believers follow Jesus, and they became imitators.
3. They suffered for their faith, yet the Holy Spirit gave them joy.
4. Their transformed lives became a model for others.
5. And eventually, the message of Jesus began to “ring out” from them everywhere they went.

Before we can effectively share the good news, we need to understand and receive the good news ourselves. The gospel says that we do not have to spend our lives trying to earn God's favor. Jesus has already made a way..

A gospel-sharing church is not simply a church that talks about evangelism. It is a church filled with people whose lives have been so transformed by Jesus that the gospel naturally begins to **ring out through them**.

As you leave today, you can perhaps reflect on these questions:

- Has the gospel truly transformed the way I live, or is it primarily something I know?
- Who am I currently following as an example of what it looks like to follow Jesus?
- Who might be watching my life and learning from me?
- How do I respond when suffering comes? Does my hope in Jesus remain visible?
- Do people around me see something different in the way I live?
- Could someone look at my life and know that Jesus is important to me?
- Do I know my own gospel story well enough to share it?

- Who is one person God may be placing in my life so that I can share the gospel with them?
- Am I relying on the Holy Spirit rather than believing I have to have every answer?
- What would it look like for the gospel to “ring out” from me this week?

The Thessalonians did not change their world because they were famous, powerful, or perfectly prepared. They simply received the gospel, allowed Jesus to change them, lived differently because of Him, and told people why. **Before the gospel can ring out from you, it has to register with you.** And when it does, it will begin to ring out.