The Pursuit of Purity

Primary Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8

Main Idea: Because God has saved us in Christ, He calls us to pursue holiness by pleasing Him, rejecting sexual immorality, and depending on the Holy Spirit for obedience.

Leader Preparation

Paul's burden in this passage is not merely that Christians avoid obvious sin, but that they learn to live lives that genuinely please God as they grow in sanctification. This text speaks plainly about sexual purity, but it also reaches deeper into motive, worship, and obedience: God calls His people to live differently because they belong to Him. As you prepare, ask the Lord to search your own heart, expose any compromise, and renew in you a deep desire to please Him more than yourself, the crowd, or the culture.

Suggested Group Flow

- Welcome and connection: 10 minutes
- Read Scripture: 5 minutes
- Read Together: Understanding the Passage: 10–15 minutes
- Discuss: 35–45 minutes
- Pray and identify next steps: 10 minutes

Read Together: Understanding the Passage

Introduction to the Passage

First Thessalonians was written to a young church that had responded to the gospel and was learning what it meant to follow Jesus in everyday life. In chapters 1–3, Paul encourages them for their faith, endurance, and love. In chapter 4, the letter turns more directly toward how believers should live.

This passage stands at that turning point. Paul is not questioning whether these believers belong to Christ; he is calling them to keep growing now that they do. They have entered the race of following Jesus, and now they are being urged to keep running in a way that pleases God.

Background and Key Insights

Paul says, "This is God's will, your sanctification." Sanctification is the ongoing process by which God's people grow in holiness and become more like Jesus. The sermon emphasized that this is not about

earning salvation, but responding to salvation. Christians obey not to make God love them, but because in Christ they already belong to Him.

The first area Paul addresses is sexual purity. The word translated "sexual immorality" is broad, covering any sexual practice outside God's design. In the sermon's language, God's will is faithfulness within marriage and abstinence outside of marriage. That makes this passage especially relevant in a culture that often treats desire as the highest authority.

Paul also shows that sexual sin is not private or harmless. It involves taking, using, or dishonoring other image bearers, and it damages relationships, trust, and witness. Holiness in this area requires self-control, honest awareness of weakness, and intentional refusal of situations that stir compromise.

Finally, this passage does not leave believers to fight sin by sheer willpower. God gives His Holy Spirit to His people. The same God who calls believers to holiness is the God who empowers them to obey, convicts them when they wander, and helps them walk in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Scriptures to Read Together

- **Hebrews 11:6** — This passage reinforces that the path to pleasing God is faith, trusting His word and following Him even when His ways confront our desires.
- **Colossians 1:9–10** — Paul's prayer shows that spiritual growth is meant to lead to a life that is worthy of the Lord and fully pleasing to Him.
- **Ephesians 5:3–4** — These verses echo the call to sexual purity and remind believers that holiness should shape both conduct and speech.
- **Galatians 5:16** — This passage reinforces that victory over sinful desires comes through walking by the Spirit, not merely through stronger self-effort.

Main Idea

God's will for His people is not casual spirituality but growing holiness. As those who belong to Christ, we are called to please God with our bodies and lives, and God gives His Spirit to help us obey.

Reflection Question

Where do you most feel the tension between what pleases God and what feels normal, comfortable, or acceptable in the world around you?

Discussion Guide

Leader Insight 1: Pleasing God Is the Goal

Paul begins with a simple but searching question beneath the whole passage: Are we living to please God? That question reaches beyond outward behavior into motives, habits, entertainment, conversations, thought life, and private choices. The Christian life is not merely about avoiding public failure; it is about learning to love God enough that pleasing Him becomes a real grid for daily decisions. Leaders may want to frame this gently but clearly: obedience grows where believers stop asking only, "Can I get away with this?" and start asking, "Would this please the Lord?"

Discuss:
What is one area of your daily life where you most need to start asking, "Would this please God?" before you act?

Discussion Questions

1. Paul says the Thessalonians were already following the Lord, but he still urged them to do so "even more." Where have you grown in obedience, and where do you sense God calling you not to settle?
2. When you think about God's will, do you tend to focus more on big future decisions or on present-day obedience? What might change this week if you treated daily faithfulness as central to knowing God's will?
3. This passage calls believers to self-control and holiness in an area where the surrounding culture often says, "Follow your desires." What practices, media habits, relationships, or settings make it harder for you to walk in purity and wisdom?
4. The sermon emphasized that sexual sin is not isolated and never affects only one person. How does remembering the good of others—future spouse, current spouse, dating relationship, church family, or personal witness—change the way we think about temptation?
5. Since God gives His Holy Spirit to empower obedience, what is one specific step of dependence you need to take this week—confession, accountability, a boundary, a conversation, or a change in routine?

Leader Insight 2: Purity Requires Dependence, Not Just Determination

Many believers have heard strong calls to purity that focused almost entirely on trying harder. But this passage ends by reminding the church that God gives His Holy Spirit. That means holiness is active and

intentional, but never independent. Believers do make choices, set boundaries, and flee compromise, yet they do so while leaning on the Spirit for conviction, strength, and endurance. Encourage the group to resist both passivity and self-reliance: God calls His people to obedience, and He also supplies the power to walk in it.

Discuss:
What does depending on the Holy Spirit look like in practical terms when temptation, weakness, or compromise shows up in real life?

Prayer and Response

- Pray that God would give the group a sincere desire to please Him, not merely to manage appearances.
- Pray for holiness, self-control, and wisdom in every relationship, conversation, and private habit.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict clearly, strengthen the weak, and help each person take obedient action this week.
- Invite each person to name one concrete next step for the week, such as removing a source of temptation, talking honestly with a trusted believer, changing a habit, or choosing a more faithful pattern of thought and action.
- Close by encouraging the group to pray for one another in pairs or groups of three, asking God for courage, purity, and joyful obedience.