



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

ECCLESIA

1 THESSALONIANS SMALL GROUP GUIDE

1 Thessalonians is one of the earliest New Testament letters and displays not only a high Christology but stresses the necessity of the Gospel within the life of the church. There was a need for the church to discover what it meant to live their lives consistent with the Gospel. They were also learning what it meant to be the church that Jesus gave his life to build.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This study guide is designed to engage your group in deep and meaningful conversation.

To Begin is designed to break the ice and allow for group members to engage in opening conversation. The questions are usually fairly simple so anyone can participate. Feel free to come up with your own question to break the ice too.

Digging Deeper is designed to take the group through the text and engage the group in a more robust conversation. The questions in this section will hopefully engage group members from all walks of life. You don't have to work through all the questions. As a leader, pick the ones that you think would best suit your group needs.

At the end of each section we have provided you with room in the **Praise & Prayer Points** to take notes and write down the prayer requests of your group. We hope that through this study that we will grow in our understanding of what it means to be the church that Jesus gave his life to build.

CONTENTS

- Session 1 – ***“God’s Church”*** 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3
- Session 2 – ***“Our Church”*** 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10
- Session 3 – ***“Passionate Church”*** 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13
- Session 4 – ***“Pure Church”*** 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
- Session 5 – ***“Ready Church”*** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
- Session 6 – ***“Church on Fire”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19
- Session 7 – ***“Responding Church”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28



SESSION 1—TO BEGIN

To get things started, let's go around the group and answer this question:

What did God use to get your attention and help you understand the message of the Gospel?

DIGGING DEEPER

- What stood out to you the most from this past weekend's service?

***Together, open your Bibles and read from
1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 then watch Session 1.***

1 Thessalonians was Paul's first attempt at offering encouragement and answering questions to the church in Thessalonica. Paul's letter gives the people of Thessalonica some direction on holy living, hope for the future, and encouragement through the suffering and persecution they were facing at the time.

- When you think about the word, "church," what comes to mind?

Maybe you've heard this said before, "If you ever find the perfect church, please don't join it. If you do, it won't be perfect anymore!" How does this phrase make you feel? Why do you think people try to find the perfect church?

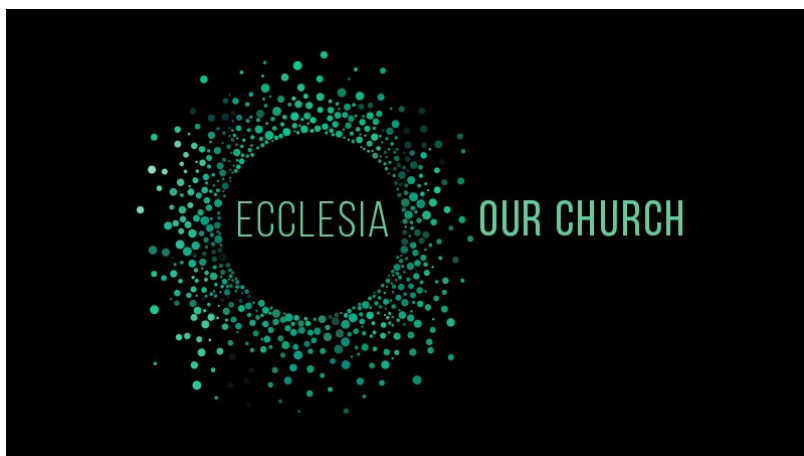
- What makes a church "good" or "bad" today? What are some important aspects for you when looking for a church?
- What does it mean practically to be a "called-out people"?
- What does faith accompanied by action look like today?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 several times, stopping after each word or phrase. After you have done this, share your thoughts within your group. What word or phrase stands out to you?

- What do you think Paul's message for us in verses 2-3 is?
- In verse 2, Paul says that he thanks God for them continually and prays for them persistently. How could constant prayer affect your relationships with the people around you?
- What are some reasons to be thankful for our church? How does being thankful impact our church atmosphere?
- Which of these qualities in verse 3 do you desire to see developed in your own life? How can the group help?

PRAISE & PRAYER POINTS

Spend some time praying for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your life.



SESSION 2—TO BEGIN

To get things started, let's go around the group and answer this question:

Who has modeled a life of faith for you?

DIGGING DEEPER

- What stood out to you the most from this past weekend's service?

***Together, open your Bibles and read from
1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 then watch Session 2.***

- Does the 'hangry monster' ever appear in your home? How do you address this?
- How spiritually hungry are you right now?
- Are you giving to others out of God's overflowing abundance or are you trying to do life on an empty tank right now?

Looking over verses 6-8, we read that in spite of suffering we can live with joy and be an example to the people around us. This is how we can influence our world! But, we must remember to

remain intimately connected to God at all times. Otherwise, we may grow spiritually hungry and our ability to live a Christ-like life will be hindered by our “spiritual mood swings.” If we are to be imitators of Jesus – so much so that others see Him in our lives – we have to spend time with him. This is what we mean by developing intimacy with God.

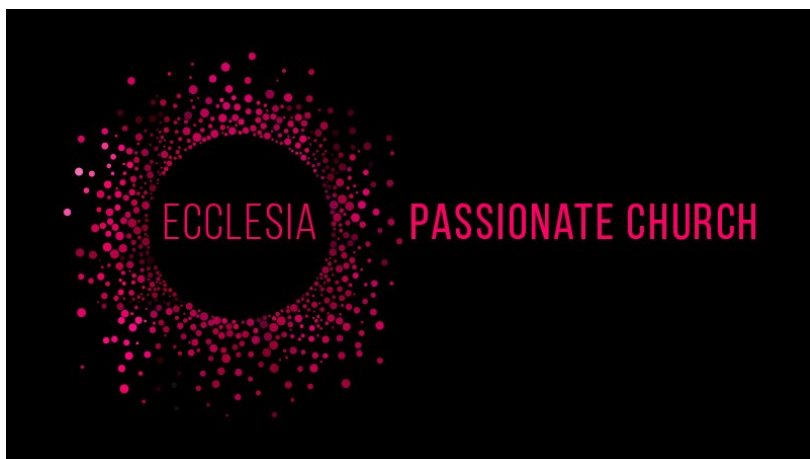
- How do you experience intimacy with God? Do you do this regularly?
- Are you in an easy or difficult time of life right now? How does that tend to impact how you spend time with God?
- What Fruit of the Spirit is most prominent in your life?
- Through your intimacy with God, what truth have you discovered that gives power to this Fruit of the Spirit in your life?
- * *Example: Patience. I know that God has been very patient with me and I am so grateful for that. Being patient is my way of showing others how loving and gentle God is when we aren't perfect.*
- What Fruit of the Spirit is least prominent in your life? Describe how life might be different if you had an *abundance* of that fruit in your life.
- Can you think of a truth you could embrace that would give more power to this Fruit of the Spirit in your life?
- * *Example: Patience. Sometimes I believe that if things don't happen right away and in the right ways, it is because I am falling behind and losing out on God's plan. It is hard to trust that God's timing is good. But, if I would trust God's plan, I wouldn't have to worry about missing out and I would be able to be more patient with myself and with others. I guess the truth that I can embrace is that God is trustworthy. I can patiently trust Him.*

- What is your first response to these questions: Do you need to reconnect to the source or do you need to partner more intentionally with God to share His abundance with others? Or, is there something else God has brought to your attention?

PRAISE & PRAYER POINTS

Spend some time praying for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your life.

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SESSION 3—TO BEGIN

To get things started, let's go around the group and answer this question:

Who is someone in your life that has been an example of what it means to have a passionate faith?

DIGGING DEEPER

- What stood out to you the most from this past weekend's service?

***Together, open your Bibles and read from
1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 then watch Session 3.***

- What are some of your life's passions?

Not everything is always going to work out exactly how we want it. The beautiful thing about living for Jesus is that God works everything for good for those who love him and live for His purposes. Paul's desire is that their love for one another would flow into all areas of life. What does a passionate church look

like? If it's anything like the church of Thessalonica, God's Church ought to be a community marked by love and holiness and the church in Thessalonica would be a passionate church, seeking after Jesus. A passionate church stands together and encourages one another through the thick and thin.

- As a church, how can we learn to support each other through the tough times?
- Take a moment and think about a time when you experienced love from another member of the church. Share and encourage each other. What motivates you to love others?
- How can the church of Thessalonica be an example for us even today?

God's church is a community that lives by faith and is a community that inspires action.

- As a church, what should be our passion towards action? In your own words, what does a passionate church look like?
- Why was prayer so important to Paul? How similar is our church emphasis on prayer today? Why is prayer so important to the local church?

Paul's desire for the Thessalonians is that they would experience the love of God and that it would in turn influence the people around them. Paul encourages the church to be strong as they continue living with confidence in the presence of God until Jesus' return.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 several times, stopping after each word or phrase. After you have done this, share your thoughts within your group. What word or phrase stands out to you?

- Which of Paul's prayer requests would you want someone to pray for you? Keep this in mind as you move into your prayer time.

PRAISE & PRAYER POINTS

Spend some time praying for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your life. Consider setting up a prayer night with your small group and spend that night praying for the church. Pray for your pastors and leaders, the small groups, outreach opportunities and all aspects of the church experience.

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SESSION 4—TO BEGIN

To get things started, let's go around the group and answer this question:

If someone asked you how to make their life more pleasing to God, what's one piece of advice you would give?

DIGGING DEEPER

- What stood out to you the most from this past weekend service?

***Together, open your Bibles and read from
1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 then watch Session 4.***

Paul begins chapter 4 by letting them know that it is God's will for them to be sanctified, which means to become more holy. As followers of Jesus, we are being sanctified through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- Do the words 'holy' and 'pure' have positive or negative connotations for you? Why?
- Why is it important to us that God is holy and pure?

- Do you believe that God's way is the best way for you or do you try to mix in some of your own ideas on life?

If we do not follow God's instructions – trusting in His way - we are rejecting God Himself. We can't take a ticket to heaven and simultaneously reject His way of life. Therefore, it is important for us to understand who God is and that all of us were made in His image, for His way of life, and His way is freedom. When we as the church live lives that are pure and holy, unified with each other and aligned with how God teaches us to live in Scripture, we mark a clear path for others so that they might find this freedom too!

Why would Paul have been concerned about the effect of their attitude on outsiders?

For whom is your life a shining light of the freedom found in God?

Would you say that there is unity in the church today?

How can we live in unity even when we don't see eye to eye?

How can our small group best represent Jesus to others so that our faith can be known in our neighbourhood?

Scholars agree that verses 11 and 12 were directed toward members of the church who had quit working and were relying on the kindness of their fellow Christians to provide them with necessities. God does not approve of this. However, this story shows us that God is constantly teaching us through the Holy Spirit so that the sinful areas of our life may be sanctified.

- When is it wise and when is it unwise to imitate another Christian? How do we know the difference?
- Would it be good if someone imitated you right now? Why or why not?

- Is there an area in your life that needs to be made pure and holy? What step can you take to address this in the next few days?

In verses 3 - 8 Paul's main concern here is warning them to stay away from sexual sin.

- What constitutes sexual sin? What are some challenges we face today in our culture in regards to sexual sin?

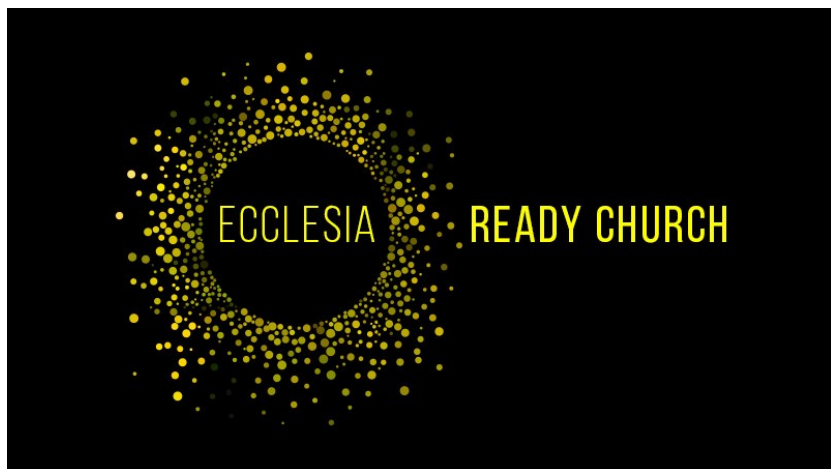
Take a few moments to read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and discuss what these verses are saying.

- What boundaries do you have set up in your life to keep you from falling into sexual sin?

Let's remember that God made the impossible possible through Jesus. We as individuals and collectively as the church will always be in need of sanctification. Praise God that it is possible through Him!

PRAISE & PRAYER POINTS

Spend some time praying for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your life.



SESSION 5—TO BEGIN

To get things started, let's go around the group and answer this question:

What made you decide to attend our church?

DIGGING DEEPER

- What stood out to you the most from this past weekend service?

***Together, open your Bibles and read from
1 Thessalonians 4:13- 5:11 then watch Session 5.***

- Do Paul's words about Christ coming as "a thief in the night" calm or stir up fear?
- Do you think about death much? If so, what comes to mind?
- What comfort do you get from your faith when thinking about death? How important is the promise of the resurrection for you?
- Can you answer the million dollar question, "Are you ready?"
- What does it mean for a follower of Jesus to be ready for His return?

In the final verses of Chapter 4, we read about the hope of the resurrection and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The intent of Paul is not to give a detailed explanation of the Rapture, but to comfort sorrow filled hearts. This is a comfort passage. Paul writes to ease their grief from the ones they have lost. Paul is saying don't worry about the ones that have died, don't worry about the ones that are still alive, we'll all be together when Jesus comes again. No need to grieve, no need to sorrow. We will all meet again!

- Why is the subject of Jesus' return the cause of so much contention in the church community? How should this topic bring us closer together?
- Why does this hope of Jesus' return change how we think about death and how we think about the present as well?
- How do faith, love, and hope sum up what it means to "belong to the day" as in verse 8?
- Of all the places, whether it is home, work, school, or church, where do you feel the need for more faith, hope, or love? How can this group help?

This week, let's practice living expectantly, as if Jesus could return any minute. As you go through your daily routine at work, home, or school, carry with you a sense of anticipation about Jesus' return. Look for moments to share your faith. Learn what it means to live with an expectant heart, a ready heart.

PRAISE & PRAYER POINTS

Spend some time praying for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your life.



SESSION 6—TO BEGIN

To get things started, let's go around the group and answer these questions:

What dream do you have for your life right now? Is there a goal you are pursuing?

DIGGING DEEPER

- What stood out to you the most from this past weekend service?

***Together, open your Bibles and read from
1 Thessalonians 5:16-19 then watch Session 6.***

- What thoughts do you have on the will of God in your life? Does He have a will for your life? Do you know what it is?
- Are you living out the will of God each day or do you feel like you have to achieve something before you can experience living in His will?
- Sometimes we can put limits on God because we are limited in our understanding of Him. How has God surprised you by using your circumstances in a way you had never expected?

Think about this statement: God's will is not what our circumstances are so much as who we are in the midst of our circumstances.

- According to Paul, the will of God is for us to rejoice, to pray and to be thankful. Is it easy or difficult for you to live joyfully, prayerfully, and thankfully in your life?
- How do these simple daily practices unlock the treasures of life with God and others?

Even when the circumstances around us are worse than we ever imagined, hope is not lost. We know this because when our eternal life was lost and we could do nothing to reconcile with God, He stepped in and made a way. It is so encouraging to be reminded that this is how God demonstrated His love for us "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) If God can make a way for our eternal lives... no circumstance we face can take our purpose or hope away. God is bigger than our circumstances.

- Do you have a child-like faith in God? Is your purpose secure in who God is? Is your hope secure in who God is?
- How much time and energy do you give to worry and discouragement? How would your life look different if you were able to trust God 100%?

A clear marker of God's people is joy, prayer, and thankfulness – because God's children know they can trust their Heavenly Father with their future both on earth and eternally! Our willingness to trust God, to imitate Jesus and allow the comfort of the Holy Spirit to consume our lives completely changes how we live despite our circumstances. Our trust in God creates space in our lives for joy, prayer and thanksgiving.

- Think about what you heard on the news today. If we are living secure in God despite the circumstances around us, how could that impact the world right now?
- Why are joy, prayer and thankfulness important for the ministry of the local church in our surrounding communities?

- How does a church's approach to joyful living, prayer and thankfulness shape our church environment?

PRAISE & PRAYER POINTS

Spend some time praying for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your life.

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SESSION 7—TO BEGIN

To get things started, let's go around the group and discuss:

Describe one experience you have had where you took a huge leap of faith.

DIGGING DEEPER

- What stood out to you the most from this past weekend service?

***Together, open your Bibles and read from
1 Thessalonians 5:23-38 then watch Session 7.***

Now the final charge, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28 really speaks about a church that is ready, a church that relies on God's holy power, and a church that is responding to the needs of our world.

- How would you define sanctification to a non-Christian?
When does sanctification begin? When does it end?

- How is God involved in the process of sanctification? What's our role to play?

Biblically, the term sanctification means "to make holy," or to be "set apart" for God's service. It contains the idea of being made pure for God's service. The phrase "through and through" translates a two-part Greek word. One part means "whole" and the other means "complete" This carries the idea of being wholly sanctified so that in the end, you will be complete. Little by little, every day, Jesus is making us more like him.

- What does being "made complete" in the end mean to you?

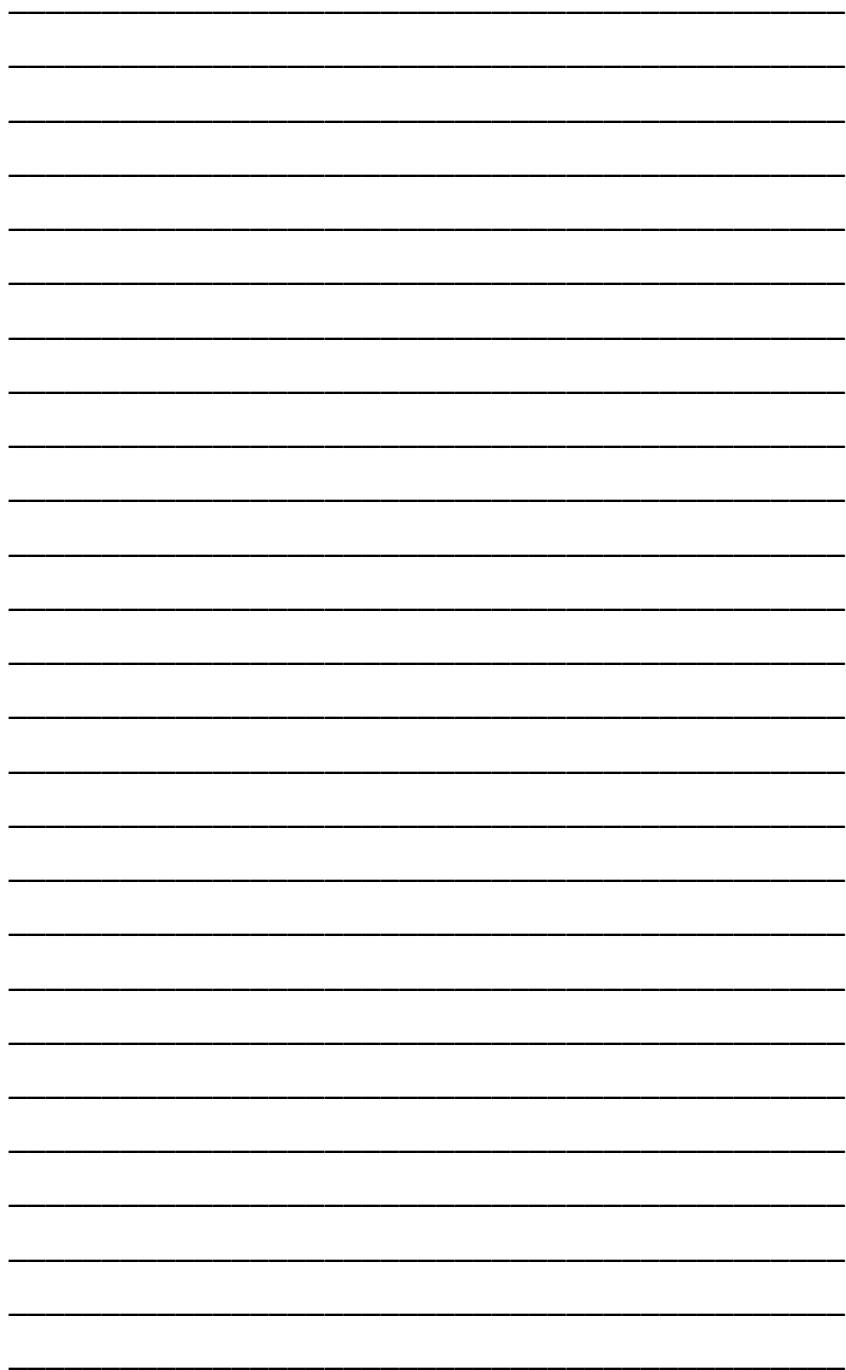
Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 several times, stopping after each word or phrase. After you have done this, share your thoughts within your group. What word or phrase stands out to you?

- Take some time as a group and put together verses 23-24 in your own words.

1 John 4:11 reads, *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*

- What are some practical ways that you have been loving others this past week? Looking ahead, what can you do this week to go beyond and share God's love with someone in a practical way?

We have a hope filled future that is grounded in Christ and Spirit enabled. Now is the time to act, now is the time to respond to God's amazing love for us. This week, be a small group that responds by inviting our friends and neighbours to our church. Share a meal together and as you build your relationships, you are building God's church.





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