

Group Study Outline

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 Theme Sentence

Evangelism is speaking God's powerful Word of salvation boldly and lovingly to people in spite of opposition.

Launching Questions

Why did the person who told you the gospel, tell it to you?
Can you remember what they were like and how they did it?
What difference did that make?

READ 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Can you reconstruct the events Paul is describing here? (*cf Acts 17:1-10*)
Why might they have thought his visit was a failure?
How does he show that it wasn't?

Why did it take such boldness to tell them the gospel?
Do we find we need boldness too? Why?

What kind of bad motives does Paul mention for evangelising? (v3-6)
Who was Paul out to please in his evangelism?
How might we be tempted to try to "please men"? Or please ourselves?
What can we learn about how not to do that, but to please God instead?

How does Paul describe his relationship with the Thessalonians? (v7, 11)
In what ways was he like a mother?
In what ways was he like a father?
What does he share with them? Why?
How would v8 speak to someone who thought evangelism was just about giving out gospel tracts to strangers? (*Not that that's a bad thing to do!*)
How would it speak to someone who didn't talk about the gospel with someone because they love that person too much?

What was the Thessalonian's response to the gospel? (v13-14)
How is v13 encouraging for us in evangelism?
How could Paul tell they'd really accepted the gospel? (v14)
Who suffers for the gospel in v14-16?
Are we willing to join them? And prepare any new disciples to join them too?

Summing up & applying it

How would you summarise what we've learnt about reaching the lost from this bit of the Bible?
What have you found encouraging? What have you found challenging?
What do you make of this quote from C.H. Spurgeon? – "Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter."

Paul was part of a missionary team, as are we in this group. How can we learn from this passage as a group rather than just as individuals?
How could we use our Tues/Thurs gatherings to best equip each other for this?
What would it look like for our Connect Group to share life with unbelievers, as well as sharing the gospel?

Reach The Lost Together

Connecting With The Disconnected

It's so easy to get lost in a sea of busyness in church life and miss Jesus' central mission for the church – "Go... and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19) The Risen Christ gathers His church around Him and scatters them out with the good news of how we can have our sins forgiven because of His death for us, if only we'd turn back to Him in repentance and faith. At heart, we are a sent people.

Emil Brunner said, "The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning." It's at the core of who we are and what we do, which is why it simply has to be one of our four Connect Group aims:

- listen to God together
- talk to God together
- care for one another
- reach the lost together



Of all of them, for some reason, 'reach the lost together' seems the hardest. I wonder if this is because we're too used to the idea of small groups simply as Bible studies. So of course we'll listen to God, and it's only polite to talk to Him too. And, yes, let's care for one another (although let's not go overboard). It's easy to think we can tick off the first three aims without ever having had any interaction other than on the night we meet for a Bible study. But it's much tougher to reach the lost together if you just meet on a Tues/Thurs night. To reach the lost together requires a mind-set shift. We are a group of people who want to reach those who aren't currently in our group.

But at the same time, the thought of doing it together can be such a relief! I think we find evangelism so difficult because we're trying to do something on our own which was always intended as a team sport! The church together has this great commission, and we should fulfil it together, using our various gifts and abilities. Because it'll probably be a new/big idea for people, give plenty of time to thinking through how you might help each other in reaching out to the lost with the good news of Jesus as a group, not just as individuals.

[NB]

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 Theme Sentence

Evangelism is speaking God's powerful Word of salvation boldly and lovingly to people in spite of opposition.

Application

- Be bold in speaking the gospel, even when it's tough.
- Do evangelism to please God, not people (or yourself).
- Love people enough to share your life as well as the gospel.
- Be godly as you reach out to non-Christians (and encourage godliness in them when they come to faith).
- Do missionary work as part of a loving team.

Commentary

The church in Thessalonica started in difficult circumstances. Acts 17:1-10 tells us that Paul came in and preached the gospel to them for three weeks. A number became Christians, praise God! But the locals didn't like it. They formed a mob and grabbed some of the new believers, dragging them before the authorities because they were welcoming these trouble-makers who say there's another King called Jesus. The authorities took money from them and let them go. And Paul escaped to go to the next city.

Imagine that poor church, facing that kind of persecution and where the most mature Christians were only converted that month! Imagine poor old Paul, dragged away from those baby believers so soon! How were they getting on? 1 Thessalonians 3:5-7 shows that Paul sent Timothy to find out, and now Tim's come back with really encouraging news – they're doing really well! And so Paul writes this letter to encourage them to keep going as they are, and to instruct them in a few things which they're confused about.

In the section we're focusing on, Paul reminds them of his time with them and how he and his team treated them. It's a fantastic insight into how Paul did evangelism and the kinds of relationships he built up with people...

1-2 Despite leaving so soon, it wasn't a pointless trip to Thessalonica. Not only because people were converted, but because, either way, Paul had the opportunity and the boldness to declare the gospel. It took a lot of courage! Because of how badly they'd been treated elsewhere (see Acts 16 for them being beaten up and put in prison).

3-6 They could have that kind of boldness in the face of aggression because their gospel appeal was coming from a good place. They weren't telling people to trust Jesus because they were wrong about Jesus. And it wasn't for some other ulterior motive to trick them. Instead God had given them the gospel "so we speak." They *have* to pass it on.

We get a sneak peak into Paul's heart as he expresses his motives for speaking the gospel. He wasn't doing it to please people, but God. This is really important in evangelism. If we're trying to please people, we just won't say anything. Proof that he's not a people-pleaser comes from what he did say to them. It wasn't flattering! The real gospel never is. But it's very tempting to want to make people feel good. Paul also never tried to get money out of them. Nor was he on a power trip, throwing his weight around like the big name Apostle he was.

This self-defence might imply that some outsiders were criticising Paul. ("He just walked out on them when it all got tough!") But God is the only one who tests our hearts and knows our motives, and Paul calls Him in as his character reference. But he also is able to draw on what the Thessalonians would have seen ("as you know", v5). The way Paul and his team behaved made it clear that their motives were good.

7 Paul likens his ministry to motherhood. He was gentle with these non-Christians and new Christians, like a mum with her tiny newborn.

8 This is a key verse in understanding Paul's approach to evangelism. It's not coldly and distantly giving over information, but nor is it all

smiles and no real message. Love and truth go together. If we really love people, we'll speak about Jesus. And we'll share our lives too.

Note that this isn't just Paul on his own, but together with his fellow missionaries. They shared their lives. Again, this passage teaches us how to behave as a group, not just as individuals, opening up our communal life to others as well as our personal lives.

9-10 The gospel is a free gift of love. And so to make that abundantly clear, Paul often speaks of foregoing his right to ask for financial support from the people who he has preached the gospel to once they believe. They worked two jobs so as not to be a burden. In this and all kinds of ways, the new Thessalonian converts could tell that Paul's team really loved them and were behaving properly towards them.

11-12 Not only was their ministry like motherhood, here it's like fatherhood. (Incidentally, these passages tell us an awful lot about the difference between the roles of mums and dads, but that's not the main point.) They were like fathers to them, in that they taught them the truth and how to live rightly in light of it. In those days, a son would be his father's apprentice at work. Paul's team showed their 'sons' the ropes of Christian living. In so doing, they were fulfilling the Great Commission, which tells us to "make disciples" not just converts, and to "teach them to observe all that [Jesus] commanded." (Matt 28:20) In our evangelism, our job with people doesn't stop when they first put their trust in Jesus. We need to nurture their young faith into godliness.

13 The sign that the Thessalonians really were converted was that when they heard Paul talking, they had ears to hear that this wasn't just any old message; this was God Himself calling them to trust in Jesus. That is true for every conversion before or since. There's a sense in which the hearer sees the superior importance of *this* message over other messages. It's not man's good idea, but God's good news.

This is an encouraging verse for us in our evangelistic efforts. Firstly, that when we speak the gospel, "what it really is" is the word of God. We should have utter confidence in that. And secondly, that this Word of God is "at work" bringing people to hear it for what it is and become believers. The gospel is a powerful word.

14-16 How they could tell that the Thessalonians really *had* heard the gospel as God's Word was how they were willing to suffer for the gospel. They joined in with imitating the great pattern of suffering. The church in Judea suffered at the hands of their Jewish community. The Thessalonians had the same thing from *their* neighbours. The prophets faced the same treatment, as did Paul and his posse, and most of all Jesus, who was killed for us. You can tell real acceptance of the gospel by how people are willing to join in with God's elite band of the persecuted.

Opposing gospel spread displeases God, but it's also a crime against humanity (v15), because it's denying the world of the news they need to be saved. Whatever the "wrath" is that Paul speaks about (possibly the impending destruction of Jerusalem) the opposition won't get away with it forever. God is utterly committed to His gospel spreading.