

SESSION 2

love-filled service

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

1 Thess. 2:1–16

BUILDUP THEME



PREPARE TO SERVE

God wants believers to serve others with His love at heart.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

Students will evaluate whether God's love motivates their service for Him.

MEMORY VERSE

"As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:11, 12).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Have you ever heard someone say they see no difference between the conduct of a believer and that of an unbeliever? Do you know anyone who has questioned the gospel message because of a believer's inconsistent behavior? No believer is perfect. But we must always be careful to live before others in a way that supports our testimony and reveals God's love. When others know we are believers, they will examine our lives more closely.
- ☐ Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16. As Paul recalled his behavior among the Thessalonians, he shared that his team sought to please God above anyone else. Their actions supported the gospel message they proclaimed, resulting in a successful ministry.
- ☐ Lead your students to consider their behavior and to think about how well it supports their testimony of God's love. All believers should be known by their love for the Lord.

Session Summary

Paul appealed to the Thessalonian believers' own experience as proof of his successful ministry among them. The believers could testify that Paul's motives for preaching the gospel had been pure. Paul's team had spoken the truth with courage, seeking no financial gain, praise, or glory for themselves. They had served the Thessalonians selflessly and gently. And when some of Thessalonians trusted Christ, Paul's team directed them firmly on the path to spiritual growth. The missionaries were effective because they had a good testimony that supported their message. In response, the Thessalonian new believers gladly faced persecution for the cause of Christ.

Session Starters

Option 1—Evidence on the Job

Gather

- Whiteboard and markers.

Steps

1. Write the following two sentence starters on the board:
 - Others can tell I love my job by . . .
 - Others can tell I hate my job by . . .
2. Students consider how they would finish one of the two sentences. Those who aren't currently working can choose a major responsibility they regularly fill.
3. Students share their completed sentences. Allow them to comment on each other's answers.
4. Transition to the Bible study.

When Paul ministered to the Thessalonians, no one could accuse him of hating his job. His Christlike actions showed he loved God and loved the lost. We can observe Paul's ministry in Thessalonica to learn what it means to serve God passionately.

Option 2—Character Masks

Gather

- Resource 73-R3.

Steps

1. Display resource 73-R3 and discuss acting.

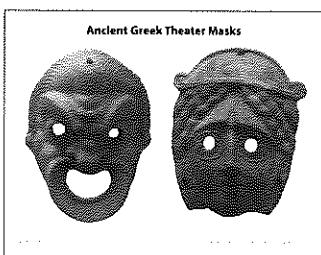
Masks like these were used in ancient Greece. The masks helped the person in the back row of the amphitheater to see the characters' emotions.

ASK: What emotions are reflected on the ancient Greek masks? *Anger and fear.*

ASK: What experience do you have with acting? What were the hardest roles you had to play? Why?

2. Transition to the Bible study.

Actors often play characters that don't reflect their actual lives. As believers, we shouldn't be playacting through life. Paul talked about



73-R3

his behavior among the Thessalonians. At no time did he cover up (mask) his identity in Christ. His conduct proved he was a true messenger of the gospel. This session will challenge us to live out our identity in Christ.

Bible Study

In reviewing his ministry in Thessalonica, Paul listed his actions and attitudes. His list reveals that God's love was at the heart of his ministry. His list forms the main points of this study and provides us with guidance for our own service to God.

I. Seeks to Please God (1 Thess. 2:1, 2)

A. Shares God's message (2:1, 2)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:1.

The ministry of Paul's team in Thessalonica had not been fruitless ("in vain"). The Thessalonians' shining example throughout the lands proved the missionaries' work was not a failure. But even more important, the Thessalonian believers knew from their own experience how successful the missionaries had been. Their lives had been turned upside down in a good way. In a sense they were finally living "right side up" thanks to the gospel.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:2.

The believers knew about the missionaries' persecution in Philippi (Acts 16:22, 23). After their shameful treatment there, Paul and Silas were willing to risk more pain and suffering by boldly preaching the gospel to the Thessalonians. Such boldness proved God empowered their ministry.

The gospel should be the center of our life's message. We should seek to share it no matter the cost and at the expense of other pursuits.

ASK: Who or what are you tempted to make the center of your life's message? (Q3)

ASK: What do your social media posts say about who or what is the center of your life's message? (Q4)

B. Has godly motives (2:3–6)

Being focused on sharing the gospel isn't enough. We need to do so with godly motives. Paul gave evidence that he had godly motives when he first arrived in Thessalonica.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:3, 4.

The missionaries preached with pure motives. Their ministry didn't come from a desire to deceive the Thessalonians for selfish gain. They delivered the true message of the gospel, neither adding to it nor taking away from it, seeking to please God. God had trusted them with the gospel, and they had proved worthy messengers, knowing that God would test their motives.

ASK: What does God discover when He tests someone's motives for serving Him? (Q5) *The truth. He knows our hearts better than we do.*

God sees our motives as they are, so we must make sure they're pure.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:5.

Flattery is telling people what they want to hear so they will do what the flatterer wants them to do. The missionaries had not used flattery in Thessalonica. They weren't hiding any greedy motives as they spoke. Their work wasn't a get rich scheme. Paul confidently called God to witness to his pure motives.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:6.

As an apostle, Paul had the authority to demand recognition or special treatment from the Thessalonians. Perhaps he could have requested lodging at a ritzy inn and meals at a five-star restaurant. Instead, Paul and his fellow missionaries humbly served the Thessalonians. They sought no praise or glory from anyone. The Thessalonian believers could attest to the missionaries' sincere motives.

ASK: Why did Paul choose to be a humble servant rather than a greedy evangelist? What did he understand about serving God? (Q6) *That any earthly goods gained through greediness would lead to a sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction and that humbly serving others would bring him great joy and eternal reward.*

Believers whose motive for service is to get rich will never be satisfied in this life. Greediness and serving God don't mix.

II. Shows Motherly Care (1 Thess. 2:7, 8)

A. Sincerely cherishes others (2:7)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

Sincere motives led the missionaries to serve Thessalonians in a pleasant manner. The missionaries were at ease with the Thessalonians, quickly becoming their friends even before the Thessalonians had trusted in Christ. Paul compared his concern for the Thessalonians to that of a mother caring for her newborn child. A mother adapts her lifestyle to her newborn to meet the child's needs.

ASK: What does it take to come to the place of cherishing the lost as a mother cherishes her newborn? (Q7) *It takes a deep sense of the value of each person in God's eyes as shown by His sacrifice to provide salvation for the lost.*

We should cherish the lost and recognize their desperate need for God's grace. If we criticize them, treat them as "unclean," or ignore them altogether, then we need to get a fresh understanding of God's saving grace and His coming wrath on sinners.

B. Sacrificially cares for others (2:8)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

As the missionaries preached the gospel to the Thessalonians, they also shared themselves with them. The missionaries served the Thessalonians with their time and energy and would have given their lives for their salvation. In fact, they had risked their lives in sharing the gospel with them. Their affectionate care for the lost drove them to put their lives on the line without a second thought.

ASK: Likely none of us will face death for sharing Christ, so why don't we share Christ more? How do our personal concerns compare to those Paul faced? (Q8)

Reaching the lost for Christ is worth great sacrifice. Many others have given their lives, some recently, to win the world to Christ. That is the level of care God wants us to have for the lost. We ought to see them as little children in desperate need of care.

III. Gives Fatherly Instructions (1 Thess. 2:9–12)

A. By example (2:9, 10)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

Paul and his companions worked hard to avoid creating a financial burden for the Thessalonians. They came to serve them free of charge and with no obligations. The missionaries supported themselves by working at other jobs, refusing to cloud the gospel message by demanding the Thessalonians support them financially. The missionary team truly offered the message of eternal life with no strings attached.

ASK: How do today's missionaries avoid the appearance of wanting money from the people they are trying to reach? (Q9) *They raise support from churches and individuals in the United States before going to the mission field.*

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:10.

Paul described his team's behavior as holy, just (righteous), and blameless. Paul didn't claim perfection, but his team was careful not to

God blessed Paul for his faith and for his sensitivity to the Thessalonians. When Paul and his companions found themselves lacking, God provided through the ministry of the church at Philippi (Phil. 4: 15, 16).

ruin their opportunity to share the gospel. He called on God and the Thessalonian believers to testify to the sincerity and consistency of his missionary team during the early days of their ministry in Thessalonica.

Their conduct had been holy because they had been set apart for God's work and had carried it out with great devotion. They had behaved justly (righteously) by meeting the standard God had set for their ministry. And they had been blameless in the eyes of all who witnessed their outward actions and attitudes. Although they were not perfect, no one found fault with them. The behavior of Paul's team supported their message in every way.

ASK: What might have happened if Paul's conduct had conflicted with his message? (Q10) *His ministry would not have been nearly as successful.*

The lost should see in us what it means to be a follower of Christ. If we act like them, they won't see the point of trusting in Christ.

ASK: What are some actions and attitudes that would be inconsistent with the gospel message? (Q11) *Complaining about circumstances or other people, worrying, treating any sin lightly.*

B. By exhortation (2:11, 12)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12.

Paul's team led the Thessalonians to Christ and then helped each of them take initial steps toward spiritual growth. Just as a loving father exhorts (strongly urges) his child along the right path, Paul's team comforted and charged the Thessalonians to walk worthy of God. All new believers need to be encouraged to walk worthy of God.

ASK: Who serves as a guide for your spiritual growth? (Q12)

Paul's team wanted the Thessalonians to live in ways consistent with the gospel. Their lives needed to reflect their new relationship with God.

God's call to believers is a continual calling into a life that honors and glorifies Him. Bringing glory to God daily in all areas of life is not always easy. We must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, Who keeps us mindful of God's Word and gives us the power to live by it. Our behavior, then, will be evidence that we are true believers, ensuring a more consistent testimony in our lives.

ASK: How can we help each other maintain consistent testimonies? (Q13) *Encourage and support each other in making right decisions; hold each other accountable; lovingly point out inconsistencies.*

IV. Gives Thanks to God (1 Thess. 2:13–16)

A. For His saving work (2:13, 14)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

Because of the missionaries' faithful, sincere ministry, the Thessalonians had heard and believed their teaching as true words from God rather than from men. Paul thanked God for their response to the gospel, which was working effectively in their lives. They had turned from idol worship to the one true God, and news of their faithful lives had spread abroad.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:14.

Paul noted that the Thessalonians had suffered persecution from their own countrymen just as the Jewish believers had suffered persecution from their fellow Jews. His point is that God's Word transforms new believers into sacrificial followers of Christ.

Hopefully, no one has ever wanted to kill you because of your faith! But you may have experienced some unpleasant results of living out your faith.

ASK: In what ways might you suffer consequences for believing and living the gospel? (Q14)

B. For His righteous wrath (2:15, 16)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:15.

The Jews killed Jesus and the prophets before Him, and they severely persecuted Paul and his team to prevent them from preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. They rejected Jesus as their Messiah (deliverer) and strongly disapproved that Christians were not required to keep Jewish religious laws. In hindering the spread of the gospel, the Jews opposed humanity because all people need to hear the gospel.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:16.

As a scattered nation under the rule of Rome, the Jews were already experiencing part of God's wrath. Still to come is the wrath God will pour out on the final day of judgment (Rev. 20:15). The unbelieving Jews were filling up a storehouse of sins for which God will eternally punish them and all other unbelievers.

Paul's point is that God will justly bring His wrath on the enemies of the cross. Our job is to share the gospel with the lost, emphasizing God's saving grace and coming judgment. Remember that Paul was once an enemy of the cross. He hunted down and arrested believers before he met and trusted in Christ (Acts 9:1–9).

ASK: Have you wished God would bring His wrath immediately on someone? What should be our desire for all people? (Q15) *That they would be saved.*

Session Application

Steps

1. Review the key points from the Bible study.

Paul's team demonstrated the love of God in their service in Thessalonica in the following ways: (1) They sought to serve God by sharing God's message with godly motives. (2) They showed motherly care by cherishing the Thessalonians and sacrificing themselves to win them. (3) They gave fatherly instructions by example and exhortation. (4) They gave thanks to God for His saving work and coming righteous wrath.

2. Help your students evaluate their service to God.

ASK: How does God's love in your heart affect your service to others? (Q16)

ASK: What could you do to get a fresh sense of God's love for you and for others? (Q17)

3. Challenge your students to love the unbelievers in their lives enough to seek to reach them. Encourage them to talk to God about ways their lives might be hindering their message of God's love and grace.

SESSION 3

quit-proof faith

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

1 Thess. 2:17—3:5

BUILDUP THEME



PREPARE TO SERVE

God will help believers overcome barriers to ministry and temptations to give up.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The students will consider eternal consequences

MEMORY VERSE

"And (we) sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: that no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto"
(1 Thess. 3:2, 3).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:5 and review the events Luke recorded in Acts 17. Think about the opposition Paul faced in his ministry to the Thessalonians. Name some obstacles you've encountered in your service to Christ. Consider things like unwanted changes in plans, distractions, temptations, and unavoidable setbacks. How did you handle the obstacles?
- ☐ Satan likes to use obstacles to discourage us as we serve Christ. He hopes we will give up. But God can overcome the barriers and even use them for His glory. Because God is working through us, we can expect that our service will be successful.
- ☐ Your students will face obstacles and temptations in serving the Lord. This session will prepare them to expect opposition to their faith and encourage them not to give into temptations to quit.

Session Summary

Paul expressed his desire to see the Thessalonian believers again but was hindered from doing so. He faced persecutors whom Satan used to keep him out of Thessalonica. Despite the opposition, Paul knew the ministry in Thessalonica would be successful. He looked forward to the day when he could present the Thessalonian believers to the Lord. In the meantime, Paul sent Timothy to encourage the new believers and strengthen their faith in God. Paul warned that all believers should expect opposition and temptations to quit.