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DECEMBER 2008

TEACHING PLANS

AN EXPLORATION OF THE BOOKS OF 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

WHAT IS FAITH ALL ABOUT?

This issue we're exploring what it truly means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Whether you're new to this whole Christianity thing or have known Christ for a while, you probably have a lot of questions—a lot of the time. The apostle Paul traveled to Macedonia (now modern-day northern Greece) to share this message of Christ with the people in the city of Thessalonica. These books are his writings to these new converts, teaching them what it meant to live their new faith. Paul's advice is just as relevant to us today.

WHAT'S INSIDE ...

The goal of the *Collegiate* online features is to bring you a structured teaching plan with additional helps and relevant questions to equip you to lead a strong discussion-based lesson. Here's a breakdown of what's inside: *Getting Started* helps introduce the topic and get your students engaged in the lesson. *Need to Knows* highlights the main characters, historical context, and key verses of each lesson. *Explore the Bible* leads your students through the Scripture passages of the lesson, helping them understand the text, its historical and cultural context, and what it means to them today. *Apply to Life* gives you ideas for furthering the application of the Scripture, so students can take active steps to process what they're learning and how it impacts their lives. Be sure you also utilize the commentary provided (threadsmedia.com/collegiate) to help with your preparation and personal study of the lessons.

As always, we're here for you. Please send us your questions, thoughts, and suggestions. Let us know what we could do better and how these teaching plans could be even more relevant to your students and your ministry.

Waiting to hear from you,

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70 sheets/college ruled
11x8½in/27.9x21.5cm

notebook

→ THIS WEEK YOU'LL NEED

- A COPY OF THIS LEADER GUIDE
- THIS WEEK'S LESSON IS ON PAGE 30 OF THE FALL ISSUE OF *COLLEGIATE*.
- THE SONG "ONLY A MAN" BY JONNY LANG, FROM THE ALBUM *TURN AROUND*, TO PLAY FOR THE CLASS AS THEY ARRIVE.

NEED TO KNOWS

CHARACTERS¹

PAUL—a missionary, theologian, and writer. He wrote 13 epistles that are a part of the New Testament. His conversion and missionary journeys are detailed in the Book of Acts. The focus of Paul's message in all of his letters is the teachings and life of Jesus Christ.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Thessalonica was the largest city in first-century Macedonia and the capital of the province. The church there was established by Paul, Silas, and Timothy (Acts 17:4). Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians in large part to educate the new Christians on some of the aspects of the Christian faith. The letter is dated around A.D. 50, making it one of the earliest of Paul's letters.

FOCAL PASSAGES

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

KEY VERSES

1 THESSALONIANS 1:2-4

For more extensive background into Paul and his message for the church in Thessalonica, read "The Road to Truth" by Michael Martin, found on pages 42-44 of your *Collegiate* magazine.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all background information is from *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).



RUNNING TO SET THE PACE

GETTING STARTED

Have the song "Only a Man" by Jonny Lang playing in the background as students arrive.

This section focuses on becoming a person of influence for Christ. We will examine three characteristics of the Thessalonians that made them influential believers. First, Paul praised the Thessalonians' hard work and endurance. Secondly, the Thessalonians overcame great trials. Thirdly, the Thessalonians overcame their pasts to become model believers in the community.

Start by showing pictures or reading the names of famous leaders (Abraham Lincoln, Hitler, Einstein, Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, etc.). Ask students to say the first words that come to mind when they see these people.

Lead a discussion about influence:

- What are the characteristics of an influential person?
- What inspires you to follow someone?
- Who influences you most: friends, family, professors, media?
- According to magazine covers, billboards, movies, and media, what does the world say makes you a person of influence?
- What motivates the world to succeed?
- What happens if you refuse to play by the world's cut-throat rules?

Segue into the Scripture by pointing out that the Thessalonians were people of great influence for the gospel.

DIG DEEPER

Found on page 30 of *Collegiate* magazine:

Election (Greek: *ekloge*) — "divine selection," from *eklegomai*, "to select, make a choice, choose out, chosen." The same word is also found in Acts 9:15; Romans 9:11, 11:5,7,28; and 2 Peter 1:10.

Watch the video excerpt "Laminin," from Louie Giglio's message "How Great is our God." The video is available at godtube.com.

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- THIS WEEK'S LESSON IS ON PAGE 31 OF THE FALL ISSUE OF *COLLEGIATE*.
- THE SONG "SAY IT WITH YOUR LIFE" BY WARREN BARFIELD, FROM THE ALBUM *WORTH FIGHTING FOR*, TO PLAY FOR THE CLASS AS THEY ARRIVE.

NEED TO KNOWS

FOCAL PASSAGES

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-16

KEY VERSES

1 THESSALONIANS 2:4



TELLING OTHERS ABOUT THE GOSPEL

GETTING STARTED

Have the song "Say It With Your Life" by Warren Barfield playing in the background as students arrive.

Begin by showing pictures or reading the descriptions of popular advertisements with a "catch" in the fine print. Examples include:

- "You're eligible for our million dollar sweepstakes!" (by signing up for X).
- Pharmaceutical drug that promises to cure ailment (side effects worse than disease).
- Free Credit report (by subscribing to our monthly program).
- Win a three-day paid vacation (by listening to a five-hour presentation and signing up for a timeshare).
- No interest until 2010 (when all the back payments and back interest kicks in at once).
- Johnny can't pay his medical bills (so forward this e-mail to 100 people).
- What makes people skeptical about "too good to be true" advertisements?
- Have you ever been completely ripped off by a scam?
- Name other examples of propaganda in our culture (news, media, Internet, etc.).
- When someone you don't know makes a sweet sounding promise to you via TV, Internet, magazine, or in person, what is your initial reaction?
- How does this cynicism affect peoples' reactions to the gospel?

Introduce today's section by explaining that the Thessalonian audience seems to struggle with skepticism also.

DIG DEEPER

Found on page 31 of *Collegiate* magazine:

Matthew 5:13

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by man."

Ephesians 6:18

"With every prayer and request, pray at all times in the Spirit, and stay alert in this, with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints."

Acts 4:29

"And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that Your slaves may speak Your message with complete boldness."

Consider playing an excerpt from Timothy Keller's sermon "Preaching the Gospel," found online at theresurgence.com.

For practical tips on relational evangelism, read the article "Sand & Light" by Brooklyn Noel, found on page 52-55 of your *Collegiate* magazine.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

2). SPEAK OUT OF LOVE (1 THESS. 2:7-12).

READ 1 THESS. 2:7-12.

⁷Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children. ⁸We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. ⁹For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God's gospel to you. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. ¹¹As you know, like a father with his own children, ¹²we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

One reason you probably dismiss glamorous advertisements is because you know the agencies don't really care about you. Politicians spend millions of dollars persuading you that they look out for you, but do you buy it? Paul passionately argues that he loves the Thessalonians. His love is not lip service.

- What evidence does Paul give of his love? (vv. 7-8)
- Why does genuine love require sacrifice?
- How does Paul's love for the Thessalonians give credibility to his gospel message?
- How does loving someone make you vulnerable?

We cannot manufacture love for others. It comes from a relationship with God. When we get close to God, he empowers us to love people and see them differently.

- How does this take the pressure off you "trying" to love the people around you?
- How does the world define love?

- Do you agree with this definition?
- According to Paul, real love is about action and sacrifice.
- Why does this kind of love intrigue the world?
- When you love people, how does that strengthen what you say about Christ?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7.

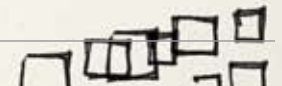
⁴Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not envy; is not boastful; is not conceited; ⁵does not act improperly; is not selfish; is not provoked; does not keep a record of wrongs; ⁶finds no joy in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

READ EPHESIANS 5:1-2.

¹Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. ²And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

We are called to give our lives for others because Jesus was willing to give His life for us.

For an article on the impact of real love on one man's life, read "Speak, But Not Without Love" on pg. 22 of *Collegiate* magazine.



THIS WEEK YOU'LL NEED

- A COPY OF THIS LEADER GUIDE
- THIS WEEK'S LESSON IS ON PAGE 32 OF THE FALL ISSUE OF *COLLEGIATE*.
- THE SONGS "O COME O COME EMMANUEL" BY SUFJAN STEVENS, "SILENT NIGHT" BY SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER, AND "O HOLY NIGHT" BY JOSH GROBAN TO PLAY FOR THE CLASS AS THEY ARRIVE.

NEED TO KNOWS

CHARACTERS

MARY—mother of Jesus and wife of Joseph; a virgin whose conception was a fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.

GABRIEL—A heavenly messenger who appears four times in the Bible, each time delivering a message from God. He announced the births of John the Baptist (Luke 1:8-20) and Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).

ELISABETH—mother of John the Baptist, wife of Zacharias, and a relative of Mary; she was barren in her old age until she conceived John the Baptist whose ministry led the way for Jesus.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

INCARNATION—God's becoming human in the person of Jesus in order to reveal Himself to humanity for its salvation. Jesus is the incarnate Word or Son of God. He mediates God to humans and represents humans to God. The Incarnation was initiated in Mary's conception.

FOCAL PASSAGES

LUKE 1:26-56

KEY VERSES

LUKE 1:31-33



CHRISTMAS IS THE GOSPEL

GETTING STARTED

Have the songs "O Come O Come Emmanuel" by Sufjan Stevens, "Silent Night" by Sixpence None the Richer, and "O Holy Night" by Josh Groban playing in the background as students arrive.

Christmas Cliché

Give your students a sheet of paper. Give them 30 seconds to write down as many Christmas Clichés as possible. (Examples include: tree, candy cane, Santa, reindeer, bells, carols, holly, mistletoe, etc.) Share your answers and talk about your favorites.

The Christmas story in the Bible teeters dangerously close to becoming a cliché in our culture. Even non-Christians could probably recite it word for word. Ask God to reveal mystery and awe to you through the Christmas story this year. Study it with purpose. Resolve to learn something new about our Savior's entrance into the world. God's Word never returns void.

DIG DEEPER

Found on page 32 of *Collegiate* magazine:

Consider playing an excerpt from Mark Driscoll's sermon "Incarnation: God Comes." The sermon is available as a free download on iTunes.

Recommend that your group watch *The Nativity Story*, the 2006 movie from New Line Cinema. This would also be a great excuse to get together for a Christmas party before students leave for Christmas vacation.

THIS WEEK YOU'LL NEED

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NEED TO KNOWS

CHARACTERS

TIMOTHY—A missionary who traveled with Paul and journeyed on individual mission trips. Paul greatly respected his character (Phil. 2:20-22) and wrote two letters to Timothy that are in the New Testament canon.

FOCAL PASSAGES

1 THESSALONIANS 2:17–3:13

KEY VERSES

1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13

BE HAPPY FOR THE FAITH OF OTHERS

GETTING STARTED

Ask your group to list every type of communication available to us right now. Options include:

- Face to face
- E-mail
- Text
- IM
- Twitter
- Letter
- Myspace
- Facebook
- Phone
- Others?

- Which kind of communication do you prefer?
- Does technology help us connect on a deeper level?
- What are the pros and cons to using virtual forms of communication?
- What do you gain by talking in person?

DIG DEEPER

Found on page 33 of *Collegiate* magazine:

Get Involved: Across the globe people are being persecuted daily for their faith. Just as Paul leaned heavily on the faith of the Thessalonian church, your persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ need your encouragement. Visit prisoneralert.com and opendoorsusa.org to find out how you can write to imprisoned and persecuted believers.

Hebrews 13:3

“Remember the prisoners, as though you were in prison with them, and the mistreated, as though you yourselves were suffering bodily.”

By the Numbers: At the end of 2007, the persecuted church numbered an estimated 200 million Christians worldwide.

