

**1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 (NLT)**

**13** Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn't think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe. **14** And then, dear brothers and sisters, you suffered persecution from your own countrymen. In this way, you imitated the believers in God's churches in Judea who, because of their belief in Christ Jesus, suffered from their own people, the Jews. **15** For some of the Jews killed the prophets, and some even killed the Lord Jesus. Now they have persecuted us, too. They fail to please God and work against all humanity **16** as they try to keep us from preaching the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles. By doing this, they continue to pile up their sins. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last. **17** Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again. **18** We wanted very much to come to you, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us. **19** After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! **20** Yes, you are our pride and joy.

**Discussion Questions**

- 1. Based on your week so far, come up with an inspirational quote for yourself and share it with the group. It can be something you learned this week, or maybe an encouragement to get you through the rest of the week. Also share why you came up with what you did.**

**Leader Tip:** Use this as a time to let your group have fun making up cheesy inspirational quotes, but also to connect and share about their week.

- 2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What is Paul saying here? Summarize it in your own words.**

**Leader Tip:** Do a recap or reread of v. 1-12 from last week if you need a context reminder. We learned last week that the Thessalonians had been very accepting of the news that Paul had been preaching. In v. 13 he is expressing how thankful he is that the Thessalonians received his words as God's words, not just as encouraging human ideas.

**3. How does Paul say the Thessalonians accepted the words he preached to them? How did they NOT accept them? Why do you think he makes this distinction? How can we discern the difference between God's word and human ideas in our lives?**

**Leader Tip:** Spend some time discussing the significance between God's word (true, unchanging) and human ideas (trends, movements, constantly changing). See if your group can identify popular inspiring human ideas and how they uphold or contradict God's unchanging and true word. (Ex: "You be you"- This can be an encouragement to be who God has made you to be OR it can be a pass to indulge in ungodly things about ourselves that actually need to be sanctified.)

One way we can test teachings is by finding the answer in scripture ourselves. It is okay to not know the answers or question someone's teaching, but God has given us his written word so we can hold it up next to other teachings and see how they align.

**4. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. What was happening to the Thessalonians? Who were they being persecuted by? How does God describe the consequence for these opponents of the gospel?**

**Leader Tip:** God's wrath can be an uncomfortable subject to discuss, but lean into this with your students. God's just wrath (giving sin the punishment it deserves) is a very important part of his character and the gospel. We don't get to pick and choose what aspect of God's character we do and don't like because God is 100% good. The evils of sin will be punished by God's wrath because he is just- giving evil what it deserves. The wrath of God was poured out on Christ on the cross, so those who are in Christ do not have to receive this holy and divine wrath. But, for those who were persecuting God's church and the Thessalonian church were not in Christ, and they had rejected God's salvation in Christ.

**5. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20. What prevented Paul from returning to the Thessalonians?**

**Leader Tip:** Satan is real and there are spiritual forces at work that we don't always fully see or understand. We don't know exactly what hindered Paul from returning to the Thessalonians, but Satan worked in some way to keep him away. Many of the difficulties that prevent us from accomplishing God's work can be attributed to Satan who will always be working to deceive and turn us against God and his glory. But God's will is always accomplished as seen in Christ's death on the cross. Satan influenced men to murder Jesus on the cross, but his death is what paid for our sins and his resurrection is his ultimate show of victory over Satan's power.

**6. What does Paul mean by saying the Thessalonians are his hope, joy, crown, reward, and pride? How can you apply this mindset to your life?**

**Leader Tip:** The ultimate reward for Paul's ministry was not money, prestige, or fame, but new believers whose lives had been changed by God through preaching of the gospel. This is such a contrast to worldly prestige or a prosperity gospel. Here, Paul and the Thessalonians were regularly experiencing suffering, but Paul was joyful in hope that his future reward for his efforts would not only be a well done from Jesus, but all the people standing beside him in eternity with God forever.

**7. What is 1 thing that specifically stood out to you from tonight's lesson (i.e. importance of God's word, opposition to the Gospel, gospel rewards...)? Let's close in prayer, asking God to help make those a significant reality in our lives.**