**Community Group Discussion Guide
1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5**

**Sermon Overview:** This sermon will emphasize the sovereignty of God in and through the Gospel and our responsibilities to invest in one another as ministers of reconciliation.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10*

*Set the Context…*

**Context:** Paul’s gospel message was well received by many of the Thessalonians—receiving it “as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13). These new converts appeared to be quite genuine, as they imitated the established churches of Judea (1 Thess. 2:14). Paul had much to be encouraged about, but as in many occasions when the gospel spreads, affliction and tribulation are quick to follow. As Luke records in Acts 17, the Jews became jealous, formed a mob, and caused an uprising in the city, while declaring “these men…have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:5-6). The revolt forced Paul to abandon the Thessalonians prematurely, and as a father who longs to see his children, he reflects upon his beloved and his hope for them to be established in the faith.

**Commentary:** The Jewish revolt in Thessalonica tore Paul away from his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Since that time, Paul has longed and struggled to see them (1 Thess. 2:17). Paul’s affection for his brothers has not been extinguished by his parting, but rather it has been fueled “again and again” to gather with them—even though Satan hindered him (v.18). The motivation for his longing is revealed in the question, “***what is our hope of joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming***?” (v.19) In simple language, he is asking, “What will you be proud of when Jesus comes for you?” His audience might expect him to say, “my holiness”, “my faith”, or possibly “my preaching”. Yet, he does not mention any of these, instead he rhetorically asks, “***Is it not you?***” (v.19) And then affirms, “***you are our glory and joy***.” (v.20) Notice, Paul’s chief joy and boast at the second coming of the Christ is in his disciples, not himself. This is the selflessness of a minister of the gospel.

 “Therefore”, Paul says, in light of the importance of life-on-life discipleship and his deep concern for the brethren “***we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone***”. (1 Thess. 3:1) To Paul, the Thessalonians’ spiritual health is of more significance than his Christian fellowship, as he sends Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith. (v.2) He also appears to see their perseverance and progress in the faith as the antidote to coping with persecution. Therefore, the Thessalonians should not shrink back at trials, but faithfully follow the Lord through them. By holding fast, he hopes that “***no one be moved by these afflictions***.” (v.3) After all, Paul warned the Thessalonians of these trials, knowing that they were destined to face tribulation. (v.3-4) “***For this reason***,” he says, “***when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith***”. (v.5) With profound pastoral implications, Paul wants to know how his disciples are doing. He wants the Thessalonians to persevere in their faith and not fall prey to “the tempter”. (v.5) He is amply concerned for their salvation. As the nursing mother, whom he illustrated in chapter 2, cares for her children, so Paul cares for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

*Share main truths of the passage along with verses that teach them and discuss how to apply to our daily lives …*

**Key Points:**

* Paul’s crown of boasting (2:17-20)
* Paul’s sacrifice and longing (3:1-5)

**Discussion and Application Questions:**

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

1. In reference to being separated from the Thessalonians, Paul says, “we were torn away from you”, how in your life can you relate to what Paul would have been feeling?
2. While they were torn away from Paul in person, they were not torn away in heart. (v.17) How does this comfort you while we are separated from each other physically?
3. Paul says, “we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face”. (17) As we are physically separated from the church, are there ways you can commit to prayer and care for each other?
4. Paul points out that “Satan hindered” him from coming to them. What are ways (work, busyness, lack of motivation, selfishness…) that Satan tries to prevent us from gathering with the church?
5. What will you do (within your control) to ensure that gathering with community is a priority in your life?
6. Paul’s “hope”, “joy”, and “crown of boasting” is in the Thessalonian disciples. Are there any relationships you would describe in these terms? What forms these kinds of affections for others?
7. How does Paul’s model of love for the Thessalonians adjust the way we love and invest in other believers?

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

1. Paul was willing to be left behind for the sake of the Thessalonians’ faith (v.1). What should we be willing to give up for our disciples and fellow believers?
2. What are some specific sacrifices you can make for the spiritual health of others?
3. Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians in their time of affliction. How does this speak to the importance of biblical fellowship in a time of difficulty?
4. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to be strengthened and encouraged in the faith as they faced trials (v.2). What areas of your faith can be strengthened through these trials?
5. What are you doing to strengthen your faith in this unprecedented season?
6. The trials that the Thessalonians experienced were not accidental; rather they were destined (v.3). What does this tell us about how God works?
7. How does it make you feel to know that God is sovereign over our tribulations?
8. How could you use the truths of the sovereignty of God in afflictions to fuel your group’s mission to make disciples in this time?
9. How could you turn a conversation about COVID-19 to the hope of the gospel in Jesus?
10. Paul could no longer bear not knowing about the current faith of the Thessalonians, thus he sent Timothy to them. Make a personal goal to catch up and check in with one of your brothers or sisters in Christ this week.

*Share a key take away or challenge for the week…*

*Pray together in light of 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20; 3:1-5*

**Prayer Guide**:

-Pray for our church, that God would put a burning desire in our hearts to prioritize gathering with one another of the church. Pray that we would dive into discipleship and foster deeper relationships with others. Pray that we would fight to overcome all hindrances that Satan brings to keep us apart. Pray that God would provide a cure for COVID-19 and bring us face to face again to be strengthened.

-Pray for our city, that the frontline workers in Louisville would be protected in times of great physical affliction. Pray that God would stir in hearts and create opportunities for people to hear of Jesus and place their trust in him so that they are no longer moved by afflictions.

Pray for our world, that the missionaries we have sent to plant churches and serve among the nations would be comforted to know that we love them and are thinking of them. Pray that God would sustain them through the burdens they carry to labor for Christ. Pray that we would make connections with them to hear about how they are doing though apart from us in person but not in heart.