

Sermon-Based Small Group Bible Study

Join the Journey: The Renewing Word (1 Thessalonians 1:2–10)

Open

Select one of these “ice breakers” to get the conversation going toward the study.

- Remember yourself at half your present age. What is a major difference between then and now?
- Are you a fan of home renovation shows or other shows about people or things being deeply changed? What draws you to those programs? Or if you really don't like them, what draws you away?
- Name something that used to be part of your life and isn't any longer. Maybe explain how it went away.

Dig

After reading 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10 together, discuss these questions.

1. In verse 3 look at what Paul gives thanks for in the Thessalonian Christians' lives. What do you think these terms emphasize together? How do they describe something different from these people's lives before they came to Jesus? [You may note “faith . . . love . . . hope,” the trio of virtues mentioned often in Paul's letters and beyond: Romans 5:1–5–8, 21–22; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5–6; Ephesians 4:2–5; Colossians 1:4–5; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Hebrews 6:10–12; 10:22–24; 1 Peter 1:3–8, 21–22.]
2. In verse 5 Paul says that the gospel came to the Thessalonians with affliction and joy. These seem to be opposites. What makes them go together in the life of following Jesus?
3. In verse 5 Paul says that the gospel came to the Thessalonians accompanied by the Holy Spirit. What does Paul say about the Thessalonians elsewhere in our text that shows the work of the Spirit in their lives?
4. Paul links the story of the Thessalonians' renewal to “the word of the Lord” sounding forth. How do you think the story of Christians' renewal is an example of God's word (not the authoritative word like the Bible but a genuine expression of God's message)?
5. In verses 9 and 10, Paul speaks of a very specific change. What impression do you think this change made on those who knew these Thessalonian Christians before their conversion? What impact might that change have had on their friends and family?

Summary: Paul gives thanks for the remarkable transformation the Holy Spirit has brought to the Thessalonian Christians as they have come to faith and begun to grow in their faith. The rest of the letter shows that their lives and understanding are far from fully transformed, but the change they've already undergone is real, remarkable, and worthy of celebration.

Reflect

Use any of these prompts to encourage group members to apply the text to their own experiences.

- In your search for faith or walk in faith, whose transformation has had an impact on you? How did that person's example fuel your own transformation?
- Recall who you were before you knew Jesus (or imagine who you'd be if you didn't know Jesus). How is that you different from who you are now? What remains to be done with the current you?
- Think about these key phrases from the text: work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope. Which one captures a needed forward step of renewal for you?
- Think back over the themes of our vision series: Christ, transformation, campus, community, renewal. What is clearer or more meaningful to you as you have thought about these themes? What are you still thinking about?

Pray

Invite the group to pray together using any of these suggestions.

- What needs have you heard from others in the group that we can pray about?
- What is an area in which you sense the need for the Holy Spirit to bring renewal to you?
- What renewal have you witnessed in others or yourself for which we can give thanks?