



JANUARY 31 – FEBRUARY 14, 2021

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discussion questions for week 1: Let Your Life Speak

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed particularly relevant to you at this time? Was there anything you found difficult or disagreed with?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. How would you describe the tone of this letter, based on this first chapter?
3. Paul, Silas and Timothy write that they “always give thanks to God” for the Thessalonians. Why did they feel such gratitude? What does this passage reveal about their attitude to prayer?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:13. How does this verse differ from Paul’s reference to faith, hope and love in 1 Thessalonians 1? Why might this be significant?
5. The letter writers say the Thessalonians imitated them and Jesus when they “welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” What do you think this means? Have you ever felt joy in the midst of suffering?
6. What would you like others to imitate in you? What in others within your group do you want to imitate?
7. Is there an area of your life you would like to see change, so you might better “reverberate” with active faith, hardworking love, and patient, enduring hope? Take some time to pray for one another about this.

Practice for the week

Take some time this week to reflect on how your own life speaks of faith, hope, and love. Writing your responses in a journal may be helpful.

- In what ways does your faith impact your life?
- How do you labor or serve, prompted by love?
- What do you hope for, and how does this affect your everyday life?

Discussion questions for week 2: Never Give Up on the Way of Love

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. The speaker on Sunday made the point that Paul is incredibly passionate—he is devoted to Jesus and to spreading his message even in the face of violent resistance and opposition. What do think made Paul so passionate? How do you relate to his passion: do you find it inspiring or uncomfortable? What are some of the drawbacks of religious passion? How might greater passion for Jesus' Way of Love help you in a positive way?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12 and 17-20. What metaphors does Paul use to express his love for the people in the church at Thessalonica, and how do they differ in meaning? Why do you think he uses so many different metaphors? What does this say about Paul and the nature of leadership in Jesus' Way of Love?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 2: 3:1-5. What is Paul anxious about regarding the church in Thessalonica? How do his concerns relate to you personally in your own life? In what way do the same struggles challenge your capacity to resist giving up on the Way of Love?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. What does Paul encourage the church to keep doing (and do "more and more")? How do these encouragements for life in the first century CE apply to us today as we too follow Jesus' Way of Love? How could we "do more and more"? How might we be tempted or unconsciously lured out of the Way of Love by our own cultural pressures?
6. The speaker on Sunday suggested that in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Thessalonians 4:9 Paul is acknowledging his realization that when we practice Jesus' Way of Love, despite our anxiety about outcomes, God is always at work, even we can't see it. Have you ever had a similar experience—one where everything seemed dark and hopeless, but the outcome in the end was surprisingly positive and hopeful? How might this reality encourage you in the present moment?
7. Take some time to pray for one another as we each seek to persevere in Jesus' Way of Love.

Practice for the week

This simple Ignatian prayer practice can help us grow in awareness of moments in our day when we are in the flow of Jesus' Way of Love and moments where we resist or give up. Take a few minutes each evening for this practice that reflects back on our day.

Center yourself by sitting comfortably in silence with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed, and hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes, and relax your shoulders. To begin, listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air and release any tension you feel. Continue with normal rhythmic breathing, allowing tension to flow away from your body, and your spirit to be at peace.

Consciously think back over the previous day. Trace the story of your life during this period of time and observe what happened. Reflect on your interactions with people, thoughts you had about yourself and others, actions you took, how you spent your time, and how conscious you were of God's presence. As you do this, lovingly ask yourself the following 2 questions (don't judge yourself; just be honest):

- At what times did you flow in the Way of Love, and what helped you do so?
- At what times were you passive or resistant to the Way of Love, and why was that?

Continue in a posture of non-judgment towards yourself while you spend some time giving thanks and enjoying the positive moments, and then reflect on how you could respond differently in the more difficult moments. Welcome God's presence into the days that lie ahead of you, and invite God to help you be more aware and embracing of the Way of Love in every moment.

Discussion questions for week 3: Love Wins the Day

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that was new or helpful to you? Was there anything you found difficult or disagreed with?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Why does Paul tell the church in Thessalonica to have hope, even though some of their members have died?
3. Does your faith give you hope in times of grief and loss? Why or why not?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.
 - What does this passage mean to you?
 - Have your ideas about Jesus' return changed over the years? If so, how?
5. Twice Paul tells the Thessalonians to encourage one another with the things he is telling them. What in these two passages do you find encouraging?
6. Are there situations you are facing for which you feel in need of hope? Take some time to encourage and pray for one another.

Practice for the week:

This last section of 1 Thessalonians is full of emotion, including grief for lost loved ones, and anxiety and confusion about the future. Paul responds by repeatedly encouraging the Thessalonians to hope in Jesus. Take some time this week to become aware of your own emotions, and to ask God to fill you with hope.

Start by breathing deeply. Then focus, feel and sink into any heavy emotion you are experiencing, be it grief, anger, anxiety or confusion. Welcome the emotion into your body as an opportunity to learn and heal. Try to sense where you are experiencing the emotion in your body and place your hands on that area.

Identify and name the emotion, and welcome it, saying "Welcome [grief/anger/anxiety/confusion/etc.]" Sit with the emotion until you experience a genuine sense that you acknowledge it as where you are at this moment, and that you are not fighting against it. Remember that you are "in Christ"—that you belong to Jesus and he is with you, loving you and holding you as you experience this emotion.

Let go of your emotion by saying, "Jesus, I give you my [grief/anger/anxiety/confusion/etc.]" and try to feel yourself letting go. As you let go, ask Jesus to fill you with hope.

Take a few moments to be still in Jesus' presence before you return to your day.