

# the upside-down life

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 17:1–10; 1 Thess. 1

## BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God expects us to show Christ in our character and actions.

## MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The students will write application statements related to the session.

## MEMORY VERSE

“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything” (1 Thess. 1:8). NKJV

“For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything” (1 Thess. 1:8). ESV

## Teacher Preparation

- Read Acts 17:1–10. When Paul and his missionary team planted the church in Thessalonica, they provided excellent examples of faithfulness to Christ even in the face of opposition. They lived Christ before the new believers. When the missionaries had to leave town because of opposition, they left their strong Christian testimony behind.
- Read 1 Thessalonians 1. Paul and his team demonstrated the transforming power of the gospel. The Thessalonians followed their example and lived with genuine Christlike character as they interacted with each other and the world.
- If a new believer had followed you around during the past month, observing your Christian walk, what would the believer have learned about following Christ? Are there things you would have done differently?
- Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to encourage them to continue their strong start to their Christian lives. He challenged them to live in light of Christ’s any-moment return. As you study this course, challenge yourself to live with an anticipation of Christ’s return. Challenge your students to do the same. Use this session to help them realize the impact they can have on others as they live with an expectation of Christ’s coming.

## Session Summary

Paul and Silas established the church in Thessalonica during Paul’s second missionary journey. Persecutors soon chased them out of town. Later, Paul sent Timothy to check on the new believers. When Timothy returned with a good report, Paul responded with his first letter to the Thessalonians. He encouraged the new believers by thanking God for their evidence of faith. He praised them for following the Christlike example he and Silas had set for them and for becoming examples themselves. News of the believers’ life-changing faith spread as they continued living for Christ and waiting for His return.

# Session Starters

## Option 1—Three Truths

### Steps

1. Students write down three things someone would learn about them if they followed them for a week. For example, they drink a lot of coffee, they like to read, or their hobby is rebuilding cars.
2. Students share their answers. Give the other students an opportunity to comment on their answers.
3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

God designed for new believers to learn about the Christian life from watching and learning from other believers. That is part of the discipleship process. Paul's missionary team spent several weeks in Thessalonica. Their time in the city was short but their impact was tremendous. The new believers followed the missionaries' example of Christlikeness. Paul wrote to them to encourage them to continue and to keep Christ's any-moment return at the forefront on their minds.

## Option 2—Instrument Identification

### Gather

- Musical instrument sound effects from the internet (8 to 10).

### Steps

1. Before class, locate a website that has sound effects from a variety of musical instruments.
2. Play the instrument sound effects. Have students keep a list of the sound effects and check their answers after you have played all the effects. Or simply have them raise their hands when they think they know what it is. Call on students to share their guesses.
3. Talk about the sounds instruments make.

**ASK:** Which instruments do you like to listen to?

**ASK:** Which instrument's sound do you think best represents your life? Why?

4. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul compared the lives of Thessalonian believers to first-century trumpets. They were living loudly, but in a positive way. In this session we will learn about the Thessalonian believers and what made their lives so noticeable. They provide a good example for us to follow.

# Bible Study

## Gather

- Resources 73-R1 and 73-R2.
- Trumpet player or solo trumpet music from the internet.
- End-times poster.

## I. Christlikeness Taught (Acts 17:1–10)

**DISPLAY:** Resource 73-R1. Point out the places on the map as you come across them in the lesson.

### A. One message (17:1–3)

While in Troas on his second missionary journey, Paul received a vision during the night of a man calling out, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” Paul heeded the call and headed to the region of Macedonia, along with Silas, Timothy, and probably Luke (Acts 16:8–10).

**READ:** Acts 17:1.

After establishing a church in Philippi, Paul went to Thessalonica, a major port city and Macedonia’s capital. Thessalonica lay along an important Roman road called the Egnatian Way, which ran between Byzantium in the east and Dyrrachium in the west. The city was busy and heavily influenced by the pagan Greek culture of the day.

**READ:** Acts 17:2, 3.

Paul followed his usual pattern of going to the synagogue to preach. For three Sabbath Days, he used the Scripture to prove to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah and that He had to suffer and then rise from the dead.

**ASK:** What essential truths did Paul likely include in his message about Jesus’ suffering and resurrection? (Q3) *Man’s sinfulness and helplessness, Jesus’ deity and power, Jesus’ fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, God’s grace, man’s need for saving faith in Christ.*

Paul likely used Scriptures like Isaiah 53 to help the Jews understand that Jesus suffered for them. God had planned Jesus’ death in eternity past and was pleased to crush His Son as the offering for the sins of all people, including the Jews listening to Paul in the synagogue (Isa. 53:10).

**READ:** Acts 16:19, 22, 23. **ASK:** What would Paul’s audience have learned about Paul from the fresh stripes on his back? (Q4) *They would have learned that Paul valued Christ and took his mission from Christ seriously.*

The map of Paul’s second journey (resource 73-R1) is part of the PowerPoint. You may want to print a copy of resource 73-R1 for each of your students if you don’t use the PowerPoint in class.

Paul's verbal message about Christ's importance matched his life's message about Christ's importance. He practiced what he preached. He shared that Christ served us by dying for us so we might serve Him now and glorify Him for eternity. Paul devoted his life to serving Christ His Savior (Phil. 1:20, 21).

## **B. Two responses (17:4–10)**

Paul's unified message had contrasting effects on his listeners. Luke's account continues with the two opposite responses.

### **1. Reception (17:4)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 17:4.

Paul persuaded some of the Jews to trust Christ. They joined Paul and Silas right away. Many of the God-fearing Greeks, both men and women, believed the gospel as well. All these new believers joined together to form the Thessalonian church.

**ASK:** Why would anyone want to join missionaries who had just suffered a beating and had just run for their lives from the neighboring town? (Q5) *God worked in their hearts to draw them to Himself. Also, what the missionaries had was authentic and honest. They risked their lives daily for the cause of Christ. The Thessalonians wanted what they had.*

### **2. Rejection (17:5–10)**

**READ:** Acts 17:5, 6.

The unbelieving Jews didn't like Paul's authentic message and sacrificial service, and they felt threatened by his growing number of followers. They had to change the narrative or lose their power and influence, so they gathered a group of idle, unemployed loafers, formed a mob, and incited it against the missionaries. Since Paul and Silas were staying at the home of a believer named Jason, the mob attacked Jason's house. The Jews wanted to put Paul and Silas on trial.

When the mob could not find the missionaries, they dragged Jason and some of the other believers to the city's magistrates (politarchs), claiming that the men were causing trouble wherever they went.

The missionaries and other Christlike believers in Thessalonica changed their world by turning people to Christ. The new believers' lives turned upside down. Each one had new loyalties, new friends, a new love, and a new mission. The gospel was changing people's actions and attitudes in Thessalonica and giving them a new identity.

**ASK:** How did your life "turn upside down" when you trusted Christ as your Savior? (Q6)

Rome gave the non-Roman leaders, called "politarchs," a free hand to run Thessalonica. They enforced loyalty to Caesar.

Turning the world on its head begins by dedicating oneself to sharing and showing Christ. Christ works through resolute believers to bring radical change to people's lives.

**READ:** Acts 17:7–10.

Because of the missionaries' teaching about "another king," a reference to Jesus, the Jews accused Paul and Silas and the new believers of treason against Rome. The authorities took money from Jason and the others as a "guarantee" they would cause no more disruptions due to Paul's preaching. Then they let them go. But the Jews, no doubt, would stir up more trouble as the believers continued to share the gospel. So, the new believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea, an out-of-the-way town.

**ASK:** What do you think about the rulers' attempt to stop the spread of the gospel by taking money from some of the new believers? (Q7)

The Thessalonian rulers had no idea what the missionaries had unleashed in their city by sharing and showing the gospel of Christ, but they soon would. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians a year or so later reveals a quickly spreading gospel.

## **II. Christlikeness Caught (1 Thess. 1:1–5)**

While still on his second missionary journey, Paul sent Timothy to check on the new believers in Thessalonica. Timothy returned with an encouraging report, and 1 Thessalonians is Paul's response. Paul wrote his letter from Corinth to acknowledge the Thessalonians' Christlikeness and to encourage them to continue in their walk with the Lord.

### **A. Evidence of Christlikeness (1:1–3)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

Paul opened his letter by emphasizing the Thessalonians' new standing "in God" and in "Christ." The Thessalonians had once been in the world and in sin. Through Christ, the believers became children of God the Father and entered a life-changing relationship with Him.

Paul prayed the Thessalonians would know grace (God's favor and help) and peace, a greeting he commonly used in his letters. The Thessalonians, who were in the middle of persecution and unease, needed God's supporting help and peace.

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3.

Paul thanked God for the new believers in Thessalonica and felt compelled to pray for them every time he thought of them. They had much to learn and faced serious opposition. Paul was confident his prayers would help, and they did.

Paul noted the Thessalonians' work of faith. He did not mean they had gained salvation through good works. Rather, their strong faith and belief had led them to do good works. Their works were evidence of their faith and of their thankfulness for salvation (Eph. 2:8–10; James 2:17, 18). True faith in Christ will show in a believer's works for Christ.

Second, Paul noted the Thessalonians had labored in love. By "labor" Paul meant working hard to the point of exhaustion or even against opposition. God's love working in their hearts overflowed to those around them. The new believers labored to show God's love through their service to others. Only those filled with the love of Christ would selflessly serve Him when facing dangerous and troubling times.

**ASK:** What compels a believer to work to the point of exhaustion for Christ? (Q8) *Christ's love for others, the seriousness of people's lostness, and the greatness of the believer's salvation drives the believer to minister for Christ.*

Third, Paul noted his thankfulness for the Thessalonians' constant hope. Their "hope" was a deep expectation that Christ would return for them. Bravely, they had continued serving God even under persecution, knowing that their time to serve Christ might end at any moment. Their hope drove them to use their time wisely, buying up opportunities to serve the Lord while they could.

## **B. Election to Christlikeness (1:4)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 1:4.

The Thessalonians' faith, love, and hope revealed they were true believers. These qualities served as evidence that God had elected, or chosen, them for salvation. The truth that God ultimately works in people to draw them to Himself so that they respond to Him in faith should encourage us to be faithful witnesses. A person should never use election as an excuse not to witness. The Bible is clear that God chooses to use believers to share the gospel (Matt. 28:19, 20; Rom. 10:14, 15).

We know from other passages that God loves the world and doesn't want anyone to die without trusting Christ (John 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:9). God's love motivates Him to choose some to salvation, including the Thessalonians in Paul's day. So, Paul added that God elected the Thessalonians because they were beloved, or loved by God.

**ASK:** On what basis does God elect some to salvation? (Q9) *God's choice is based on His grace. No one deserves salvation or merits it more than anyone else (Eph. 2:8, 9).*

## **C. Empowerment for Christlikeness (1:5)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

Paul depended on the Holy Spirit to empower and guide his preaching. And he counted on the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of those who heard the gospel. The Spirit didn't disappoint. He used Paul's preaching to convict the Thessalonians of their sin and changed them when they put their faith in Christ.

Paul added that he and Silas were living testimonies of the Spirit's power. As mentioned earlier, the missionaries suffered a beating in Philippi before arriving in Thessalonica (Acts 16:22, 23). Their confident and enthusiastic preaching despite their wounds and bruises provided compelling evidence of the Spirit's power in their lives.

**ASK:** Who has shown you what it means to live by the Spirit's power? (Q10)

### **III. Christlikeness Trumpeted (1 Thess. 1:6–10)**

#### **A. Walking by the Spirit (1:6–8)**

The Thessalonians imitated both Paul's example and Christ's example of responding to persecution joyfully and faithfully by the Holy Spirit's power.

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7.

The Thessalonians' lives had become examples for other believers in the region of Macedonia and then beyond to the region of Achaia. They were walking by the Spirit, and it showed. People began talking about them, noticing there was something unusual happening in their lives.

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 1:8.

Paul wrote that the Thessalonians' testimony had "sounded" out the word of the Lord. The "sound" was like a trumpet blast.

**ACTIVITY:** Invite a trumpet player to play a few notes. Or play the sound of a trumpet using your phone with the volume turned up. Note the attention the trumpet attracts.

Paul compared the Thessalonians' example to a trumpet blast because actions consistent with the gospel often sound out louder, clearer messages than words alone. All believers have the Holy Spirit and the opportunity to be a "trumpet blast" in their worlds.

**ASK:** What opportunities do you have to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life? (Q11)

#### **B. Worshiping God (1:9)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

People in the areas surrounding Thessalonica continued to report the

Thessalonians' faith, and Paul had heard reports of their faith as well. The Thessalonians had made a dramatic change from the worship of false gods to the worship of the true, living God. The Thessalonians' false gods included the Greek pantheon of Olympian gods. The founders of Macedonia named the region after Makedon, the mythical son of Zeus. Mount Olympus is visible from Thessalonica.

**DISPLAY:** Resource 73-R2. Note Mount Olympus in the distance as viewed from Thessalonica.

The Thessalonians' "turn" to God was final. They didn't add God to their worship of false gods; they worshiped Him exclusively. Like the Thessalonians' worship, our worship of God should be obvious to the world too.

**ASK:** How do you make your worship of God obvious in your life? (Q12)

**ASK:** What might you do to make it more obvious? (Q13)

### **C. Waiting for Christ (1:10)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

The Thessalonians waited for Christ's return. That doesn't mean they sat around. It means they anticipated it and looked forward to it. It motivated them and carried them through when they experienced persecution. They knew their suffering wouldn't last. God raised Jesus from the dead, and Jesus promised His followers He will come again. In the meantime, the Thessalonians served their living Savior, Who had already delivered them from sin and would certainly deliver them from God's coming wrath.

**DISPLAY:** End-time Events poster. Point out the Rapture of living believers from the Church Age, the Tribulation, and the Great White Throne Judgment.

Christ will remove all believers from the earth and take them to Heaven at the Rapture. Shortly after the Rapture, the Tribulation will begin on earth. During the Tribulation, God will pour out His wrath on unbelievers. God's coming wrath also includes His condemnation of unbelievers to the Lake of Fire. That will happen at the Great White Throne Judgment just before eternity begins (Rev. 21:11–15).

**ASK:** How should Christ's any-moment return affect your daily life? (Q14) *It should give us comfort and encouragement in our trials and motivation to live each day for Christ.*

Christ didn't return in the days of the Thessalonians, but that doesn't mean they were foolish to wait for His return. Their awareness of Christ's any-moment return helped them focus on using their days to



serve the Lord. Christ's any-moment return should be on our minds every day. It should motivate us to serve the Lord while we can.

## Session Application

### Gather

- Note cards and pens.

### Steps

1. Give each student a note cards and a pen. Students come up with a personal challenge related to this session. Read the following examples for your students.
  - I will show Christ in my character by being patient at work.
  - I will remind myself every morning of Christ's any-moment return.
  - I will identify two people with whom I want to share Christ.
2. Students write their statements on their note cards, writing the letters upside down. They will have to think about each letter and concentrate on each stroke they make.
3. Students get into groups of three or four to read their statements and show how well they were able to write upside down.
4. Discuss living life upside down.

**ASK:** What was it like to write your letters and words upside down?

**ASK:** Do your letters look better or worse than your normal writing?

Writing letters upside down forces you to think about each one. Perhaps you had flashbacks to when you were in elementary school learning to write letters for the first time. You wrote slowly and deliberately. We need to slow down and live our lives a little more deliberately. Are we living Christlike lives? Do we even think about living Christlike lives? Do others notice our dependence on the Holy Spirit? Are we turning our worlds upside down by our devotion to Christ?

5. Challenge your students to keep their cards where they will see them this week, posting them upside down. As they see the card, it will remind them of their need to live for Christ and to be impacting others for Christ, turning their lives upside down for the better.
6. Close in prayer for your students or have the groups pray together to close the session.