

Sermon-Based Small Group Leader Guide

For the week of November 2, 2014

“When Life is Unfair”

Sermon Series: *Bulletproof* (week 1 of 3)

2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

Getting Started

10 minutes

- 1) Which would you prefer to do, if you needed to clear your head or regain perspective: take a walk, read a book, hit the gym, other?

Key Concept

Life is unfair. A solid-as-steel faith, one that trusts in God’s goodness, makes all the difference in how we respond when trouble hits.

Into the Bible

20 minutes

- 2) If you can relate to feeling like the “sugar cookie,” mentioned in this week’s sermon, discuss your response to the following statement: “If you want to change the world, get over being a sugar cookie and keep moving forward.”

Leader Note: (See the *Additional Resource* for a synopsis of this illustration). This is easier said than done. Today’s discussion will center on how our faith perspective allows us either to grow through the circumstance or to be altered negatively by it.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12 (all scripture texts are in the *Additional Resource*)

- 3) ⌚⌚⌚ Paul praises God for the new Christians in Thessalonica. What is the character trait he finds most commendable in this group of believers?

Leader Note: Possible answers could be perseverance, faithfulness, resolve in the face of adversity. After participants have arrived at a related answer, consider asking the Follow-up question (below).

Follow-up Question: What is the difference between perseverance based in personal resolve and perseverance rooted in faith?

- 4) ⌚⌚⌚ Paul acknowledges the persecution and trials faced by the Thessalonian believers (v. 4). We use those words interchangeably, sometimes. But, what can be some of the differences between a “spiritual trial” and “spiritual persecution?”

Follow-up Question: How can understanding the distinctions between these two alter how we perceive what we are facing?

Leader Note: Simply stated, a *spiritual trial* is an opportunity for you to exercise faith by relying upon your relationship with God. Trials can be God-given opportunities to grow us into mature followers of Christ (James 1:2–5, 12). Conversely, when we do not persevere in faith through trials, we succumb to temptation, which never originates from God (James 1:13–15). *Spiritual persecution* comes to Christians when others, responding to Satan’s prompting, carry out harmful intent against Christ’s followers.


Reread 2 Thessalonians 1:5–12

- 5) Paul’s challenge can be paraphrased, “Look past today at what’s coming your way.” Which promises in these verses affirm this truth?

Digging Deeper


40 minutes


Read James 1:2-4

- 6)  Coupled with Paul's words to the Thessalonians, what insights could these verses from the book of James give you about your perspective towards unfair, painful situations?
Alternate Question: Based on these insights, how might you change your response to the next situation you encounter?

Read 2 Peter 3:9


- 7) When God chooses to delay justice towards those who harm his children, who benefits?
Leader Note: Those who do not have a saving knowledge of and a relationship with Jesus have more opportunity to do so and those who suffer have the opportunity to mature through the painful situation.
Alternative Question: Does the idea of God's future justice give you comfort? Why or why not?

- 8)  Are you able to trust that you will receive benefits by allowing God to settle the score? Why or why not?
Leader Note: We could be limiting God's ability to work through the situation by interfering. Some of the benefits we could miss would be spiritual growth in our own lives and our capacity to love others (see 2 Thessalonians 1:3).
Follow-up Question: How might we actually hinder God's ability to work on someone else's heart when we decide to settle the score ourselves?
Leader Note: Our actions to settle the score could reflect negatively on our faith, cause us to sin, and hinder others' from seeing the love of Christ through us – in fact they could see the opposite (of Christ's love) and possibly be driven further away from God.

- 9)  How can having the long-range perspective that comes from faith help, in Pastor Harrington's words, to "live today, as if it had already come our way?"

Reread 2 Thessalonians 1:11

- 10) How does Paul's specific prayer in verse 11 affect you?
Follow-up Question: Does this verse impact your desire to check your motives, perspective, and obedience? Please share.

 = Key questions to ask (for groups with shorter time frames)

Group Prayer

20 minutes