

## SERMON PRACTICES

### Houses of Hope: A Study of 1 Thessalonians

#### Week Two: Transformative Faith, not Empty Religion

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**Welcome, we're delighted you've chosen to dig more deeply into the Scriptures and consider what God has for you through this sermon.** These sermon practices are ideally intended to be discussed with others, so find a friend, family member, or roommate to join you. If you haven't yet joined a life group yet, check out our website at [vchurch.org/groups](http://vchurch.org/groups) or stop at the Welcome Center for more info.

#### **Getting Started**

Before you start today's study, be sure you take a moment to sit quietly before the Lord, then have one person pray, asking the Holy Spirit to give you all deep insight into the Scriptures and the ability to receive his teaching and direction in your time together.

#### **Exploring Scripture: The Life of a Jesus-Follower**

##### **Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10**

This a letter Paul and his team wrote to encourage the Jesus-following church that had started during their time in Thessalonica.

- Which phrases caught your attention the most? What seemed unclear? Is there anything that surprised or encouraged you?

**Paul commends the Thessalonians for imitating the life of the apostles and the Lord himself.** One of the main ways this was obvious to Paul was because they experienced "joy given by the Holy Spirit... in the midst of a severe suffering."

- Why did Jesus and the apostles choose a route of suffering and what was the result of their suffering?
- How has your relationship with Christ produced suffering in your life?
- Why do you think God allows us to suffer? What possible good could come from that?

##### **Re-read verse 9**

- What are the Thessalonians being commended for?

## **Reflection: False Gods & Empty Promises**

### **Identifying My Idols**

Pastor Steve Cuss said, “*An idol is anything other than Jesus that you must have to be alright.*” If I have to have a drink to be okay, then alcohol is an idol for me. If I have to be liked to feel good about myself, then the approval of others is an idol for me. Sometimes idols are really good gifts that we elevate to the place of being the greatest things in our lives. For example, I should love my family more than anything in this world. Yet, if I love them even more than the Lord I’m making them into an idol.

- What are the good and bad things that become idols for you? Write down a few of your tempting idols.
- Then sit quietly before the Lord and ask him if there are any others that he wants to bring to your attention. Sit for two or three minutes of silence and assess the thoughts that come through your mind. Don’t rush this moment. Set a timer if you need to. Then discuss what you heard in your mind.
- How might suffering for an idol feel different than suffering for the sake of Christ?

### **Identifying Empty Promises**

An idol could also be called an ‘imitation god,’ as it makes empty promises to bring good things into our lives. For example, while money can be a very good thing used for very good purposes, it can easily become an idol for nearly all of us. Its empty promise is this; “If you get more money, then you’ll be alright.”

- What are the empty promises that your idols make to you? Write out a few sentences and read them out loud. Be sure you are praying that God guides your thoughts and leads your spirit in response.
- 1 Thessalonians 1:9 says that they turned “*from idols to serve the living and true God.*” Why do you think Paul describes God in this way? How is God different from the idols?

### **Explore More**

If you would like to explore this topic in more depth, we recommend this 10-minute video on “Overcoming the Five Idols” with John Ortberg & Steve Cuss on the YouTube channel *Become New*.



### **Wrapping Up**

As you close out your time together, share some of the empty promises that you occasionally chase after. Then discuss how the Lord wants to give you promises that are guaranteed. Ask him to meet the need you sometimes try to meet through an imitation god. And pray for one another, that God’s grace & power will enable you to “turn away from idols to the true and living God.”