



Week #1 Discussion:

“The People on Your Path”

Acts 17:1–9; 1 Thessalonians 1:1

Opening:

- Welcome everyone; if new people are present, do quick introductions.
- Question:
When you hear the word “friend,” what comes to mind? Do you think our culture has lost the depth of that word?

The Context (background to read)

(Leader can read aloud, or group members can take turns. Then pause for questions or clarifications.)

The City of Thessalonica

Thessalonica was a **major port city in Macedonia**, strategically located on the Via Egnatia—a key Roman trade route that connected Rome with the East. Its population (60,000–100,000) was diverse, filled with merchants, travelers, and immigrants. This made it a **religious and cultural melting pot**, with shrines to Greek gods, Roman emperor worship, Eastern mystery religions, and a sizeable Jewish synagogue.

Daily life included public games, theater, education for the wealthy, and strong family structures shaped by Greco-Roman values. Philosophies like **Stoicism (virtue and resilience)** and **Epicureanism (pleasure and peace)** influenced thought and culture. Into this bustling, pluralistic city came Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

The Gospel Arrives (explained in Acts 17:1–9)

Paul began preaching in the synagogue, explaining that Jesus was the Messiah who had to suffer, die, and rise again. Many Jews, Greeks, and “leading women” believed, but others resisted, stirring up a mob and accusing the Christians of proclaiming “another king—Jesus.”

A New Kind of Community (explained in 1 Thess. 2:8)

Paul describes his relationship with the Thessalonians as deeply personal: *“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”* The church wasn’t just a meeting—it was a family. They lived life together, cared for one another, and became known for their faith, love, and hope that “rang out” across the region.

Discussion Questions:

Bible & Context

1. Read Acts 17:1–9. What strikes you about the response to Paul’s message? Why do you think some welcomed the gospel while others resisted it?
2. Considering the diverse and often morally loose culture of Thessalonica, what would it mean to be a “peculiar people” living differently for Jesus?

Friendship & Community

1. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 shows Paul sharing not just the *message* but his *life*. How does this challenge the way we think about friendship or church community today?
2. Sociologists talk about an “epidemic of loneliness.” Do you agree that many people feel “surrounded by everyone but known by no one”? Why do you think this is so common today?
3. Rick Warren once said: “*We are created for community, fashioned for fellowship, and formed for a family.*” What happens when we try to live the Christian life without community?
4. Who are some of the “people on your path” right now—those God may be calling you to invest in, encourage, or share life with?

Application & Prayer

1. Challenge: Identify one intentional step you can take this week to strengthen a friendship or open your life to someone. (Send a message, invite someone for coffee, share a need, pray with someone.)
2. Prayer: Spend time praying for one another, asking God to build life-giving relationships in your group and in our church.

Extra: Sociocultural Background of Thessalonica:

Thessalonica was a major city in Macedonia during the first century, central to trade, culture, and religion. Its setting provides crucial background for understanding the birth of the church there and Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians.

Population & Location: A thriving port city of 60,000–100,000, located on the Via Egnatia trade route and the Thermaic Gulf. Its position made it a hub for commerce, travel, and cultural exchange across the Roman Empire.

Family Life: Mirrored Greco-Roman norms with patriarchal households. Marriage often served social or political purposes. Slavery was common in households, and sexual double standards were accepted.

Occupation & Trade: Prosperous due to shipping, trade, and crafts. Merchants, artisans, and travelers filled the streets, and Roman military presence ensured order.

Education: Wealthy families schooled boys from age seven, progressing from literacy to rhetoric and public speaking, emphasizing reason and persuasion.

Arts & Entertainment: Theaters, festivals, athletics, and gladiatorial games shaped public life and reinforced loyalty to Rome.

Religion & Philosophy: Thessalonica was religiously plural—Greek gods, Roman emperor worship, Eastern cults, and a Jewish synagogue coexisted. Philosophies like Stoicism (virtue, resilience) and Epicureanism (pleasure, peace) influenced the cultural mindset.

In this dynamic and diverse environment, Paul’s message of Jesus as the true King and the call to a holy, communal life stood out as radically different. The Thessalonian believers became known for their faith, love, and hope amid cultural pressures.