

Bible Study 1 Thess 4:1-12 Leader's Guide

1. Have you or a friend ever wrestled with the question, "What is God's will for my life?" What were the kinds of things that were on view?

Eg What course of education? What job? A relationship (who to marry?) An expense (buying a house, a holiday) etc. Leave this hanging – we'll come back to it in the passage.

2. **Read 1 Thess 4:1-12.** What are some of the examples we've already been given of how the Thessalonian Christians were living?

Their work from faith, labour from love & endurance from hope (1:3); welcoming the message joyfully even under pressure and loving and evangelising others around them (1:6-8, 2:14); Turning from idols to serve God and await Jesus' return (1:9-10); Receiving God's word as his true revelation (2:13).

3. Living to "please" God is an important idea in this letter v.1 of 2:4, 15. What does it take to "please God"? Do you consider that God is 'pleased' with your life? *See Rom 8:8; Heb 11:6 and 2 Cor 5:7-9*

Without faith in Christ, we cannot please God. So faith (which is God's gift!) is the fundamental way we please God. Then, by faith, we seek to live our whole lives for his pleasure – trusting Christ, repenting of sin, seeking to live in obedience to what he has said. So if our trust is in Jesus, we are now pleasing to God. Then, as we live by faith – trusting God not ourselves, learning from and obeying his word, and repenting when we blow it and asking for forgiveness and help to press on – we will live to please him 'more and more'.

4. "sanctified" means to be made holy. The verse here is literally; "For this is God's will; your holiness." "Holy" is a word that describes God – perfect, glorious, distinct from what he has made.

What do the following OT passages tell us? **Read Isa 6:3; Ex 19:5-6; Lev 19:2, 20:26; Deut 7:6.**

God alone is truly holy ("Holy" x 3 in Isa 6 means totally holy or perfect in holiness) and yet h is plan has always involved making a "holy people". To be holy in that sense means being 'set apart' from others (eg other nations).

5. If God's will for us is holiness, how does this compare to the things we often worry about regarding God's will for us?

Very often we are worried about things of far less importance! It is right to be concerned about education, job, possible marriage partner etc, but these things are not of eternal significance. Being holy will impact all of these things and far more, and will continue on into eternity.

6. **Read Lev 18.** We are sexual beings with God given sexual desires. The marriage union is strengthened and deepened through sexual intimacy (cf Adam's joy in Gen 223-25 – this is not just about sex, but it certainly includes it). The assumption in Lev 18 is that sexual intimacy is normal and good for men and women, but clearly there are many places that expressing sexual intimacy is wrong. How does this chapter help us see why appropriate sexual intimacy is important for God's people? (consider also 1 Thess 4:5)

Vv3-5 & 24-30 – the unbelieving nations have all sorts of sexual practices that are not part of God's purposes for sex and are dishonouring to him. God's holy people live differently to those who don't know God. Those who don't know God are controlled not by the desire to please God but their own passions and desires (1 Thess 4:5)

7. We live in a highly sexualised culture where there are few sexual practices that aren't considered acceptable or even normal (not unlike the Roman Empire). So it is possible for Christians to justify many sexual expressions outside of marriage. But what does this passage say is at stake if we do?

We will not be 'pleasing' God v.1, sexual purity is commanded by Jesus himself v.2, This is God's will for his holy people (v.3) so to ignore it is actually to reject God (v.8) even though such practices are part of the reason God's judgment is coming (v.6b).

8. "Brotherly love" (v.9) is translating one word that referred to the love family members have for one another. How can we keep this from becoming a cliché between us as Christians? Ie what does 'brotherly love' look like as opposed to a general 'love for others', and how can we pursue it 'more and more'?

Maybe people can think of specific ways other Christians have shown them 'family love', in acts of kindness even though they didn't know them well, in rebuking them because they wanted to see them grow in godliness, being generous when you know it was costly for them...

9. Our "ambitions" often relate to the things we discussed in Q.1, but Paul sets a higher goal – being busy and diligent with whatever God has given us to do for the sake of others. Why is v.12 given as a motivation? How might this relate to the motivation to please God (v.1)?

How we get about our lives will very often have more eternal significance than the particular things we might be doing, so creating opportunities to talk about the God we live to please or putting other's needs before our own, working so that we can serve rather than be served by others, is how we show a likeness to Jesus (Mark 10:45) and how we can point others to him in our conversations.