

THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP
LESSON 9: DISCIPLESHIP AND IMITATION:
THE RESULTS OF IMITATION

What we want students to learn: That imitation is cyclical and impactful; when they live the life of a disciple, other people will look to imitate them and draw closer to the Lord as a result.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To identify people they might intentionally reach out to as people they can influence in their faith.

Scripture Focus: 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8

Supporting Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

Overview: When we live our lives as disciples following after Jesus, the world notices. And while there will definitely always be people who turn away from us and from God, there will also be people who are drawn to God because of our lives. When we imitate God and imitate other Christ-followers, our lives are impacted. And in turn, they can impact others. It's a beautiful cycle of discipleship.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each **LIFE** lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your **LIFE** lesson 9 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 9, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The *Bible Background* is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **YM360** Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know **who** wrote the book, **when** it was written, and **why** it was written.
- **What's the big deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

- **Author:** Since the early church period, the Apostle Paul has been the acknowledged author of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, though there have been recent (and failed) attempts to challenge this authorship.
- **Time frame:** 2 Thessalonians was probably penned from Corinth in AD 49–51, shortly after 1 Thessalonians.
- **Purpose:** The Thessalonians were under the false belief that the "day of the Lord" had arrived. They were greatly

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confused about the second coming, resurrection, and so on. They were scared and confused. Paul wrote the letter to help calm their fears and straighten them out, doctrinally speaking.

THE SETTING

The church in Thessalonica, who was the recipient of these letters from Paul, appears to be a congregation of mostly newly converted Christians. These men and women had grown up in the Greek culture and lifestyle and converted to Christianity after encountering Paul, Silas, and Timothy preaching around Thessalonica. One of Paul's main challenges with this church, which he encountered in several other churches as well, was pushing them to understand the very different, counter-cultural social and ethical expectations of Christianity. Paul writes this letter shortly after his abrupt expulsion from the city, along with Silas and Timothy. The trio of missionaries fled after coming down on the wrong side of the ruling authorities (you can read more about this event in Acts 17). From this letter, it is clear that Paul worries about the young, budding church in its hostile Thessalonian environment and wants to encourage it in the midst of turmoil.

THE MAIN POINT

Living like Jesus isn't easy, and in this broken world full of sin, authentic Christianity doesn't fly under the radar. Like a lighthouse on a dark night, the Jesus-follower stands out as a beacon drawing weary travelers to shelter. Those seeking fulfillment or satisfaction, those who have suffered and grown sick of sin, those who need to be made whole, will come to the authentic Christian to find the source of their confidence, joy, and love— Jesus. This lesson is a call to live differently, not just because it's how Jesus lived, but because it points others to Him.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called **The Lead In**; the Bible study section called **The Main Event**; an application-focused segment called **The Last Word**.

THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin to think about the challenge of living a life imitating Jesus.
- **Set-Up:** Each participant will need a square piece of paper (about 4"x4") and a way to show the following YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6cilmiEfg0>

FIRST, explain to your students that Origami is the Japanese art of folding paper into beautiful designs and shapes. For those of us with clumsy fingers and an aversion to crafts, origami can be incredibly difficult. It's not something that just happens; it requires diligent adherence to specific steps in order to create the desired product.

THEN, tell them that you're going to show a brief video on how to fold a piece of origami. Show the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6cilmiEfg0>

NEXT, pass out the pieces of paper to each student and tell them that you want them to try and replicate the creative process by folding their piece of paper into the origami art they just saw on video. Give them a few minutes to work on their paper. After a few minutes, have them show off their artwork. Then use the following discussion questions to help guide a brief discussion:

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- **First of all, who here made the best origami imitation?**
 - Answers will vary. If time permits, take a vote on who had the best origami.
- **Why was it so difficult to imitate the origami video after watching the video?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Do you think that if you studied this video and practiced several times you could imitate the process?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, use this object lesson to teach your students that following Christ isn't something that just happens. It requires diligent study, discipline, and practice. Just like folding this piece of origami would get easier the more we study the video and practice following the steps, imitating Jesus is a daily decision to follow after Him, to love others, and to bring His hope to hopeless places.

Transition into *The Main Event* portion of your lesson.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To show students that the actions of their lives can have a real and positive impact on those around them.
- **Set-Up:** Make sure each student will have access to a copy of the Bible.

FIRST, ask your students if they remember your discussion from last week about defining "imitation." Ask something like:

- **Do you remember how we defined imitation from last week?**
 - Answer: Imitation: The action of using someone or something as a model."

THEN, explain to them that in the passage we're reading today, Paul is writing to the Thessalonian church congratulating them on their excellent imitations. The church is full of converts who were led to Christianity by Paul and his fellow missionaries. After Paul left Thessalonica and the church behind, these new Christians carried on the good work that Paul began. Without a New Testament Bible like we have, they followed after Jesus the only way they had available, imitating the lifestyle and actions of the most dedicated Christ-follower they knew—Paul.

NEXT, have your students turn to 1 Thessalonians on their devices or in their Bibles. As they get to the passage, give them some context for the church and their relationship with Paul. You can find more information about this in the Bible Background section. Next, read or have a student read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8. Lead the students in a discussion by asking something like the following questions:

- **Who did the Thessalonians imitate?**
 - Answer: Paul says "us," but this would have meant Paul, Silas, Timothy, and, through them, the Lord.
- **What kind of effect did the lifestyles of the Thessalonian Christians have throughout the region?**
 - Answer: They became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia, and the word of the Lord sounded forth throughout the area. It might be helpful to show a map of the region so students can understand how far-reaching the impact of the Thessalonian church was. Paul said it affected "all believers in Macedonia and Achaia." You can Google Image search a quality regional map.
- **What was it about the Thessalonians that was so effective?**

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- o Answer: Their imitation of the missionaries and the Lord led them to preach the word of the Lord throughout the surrounding area. Most importantly, their faith in God preceded them and spoke to their commitment to Christ.

Explain that Paul is saying that the faith of the Thessalonian Christians had a very real impact on the people around them. Ask something like:

- **Why was it so important for the Thessalonians to imitate Paul and the others?**
 - o Answer: They were new believers and were dealing with great affliction.
- **Do you think it was arrogant of Paul to believe that others should imitate him? Why or why not?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **Why would Paul be a good example for them to imitate?**
 - o Answer: He had been following Jesus for a while and had dealt with much affliction himself.

THEN, say something like:

- **The Christian lifestyle is a cyclical pattern of discipleship. The disciples of Jesus learned firsthand lessons from Christ himself. They, in turn, lived as examples of Jesus to others. As they discipled and converted new Christians, people learned from their example and sought to imitate their actions. This is what happened in Thessalonica. The Christians converted by Paul sought to imitate his lifestyle because it reflected the life of Jesus. When we imitate the lives of other Christians, we are not praising or worshipping the individual. Instead, we are pointing back to the origin of our faith: Jesus.**

NEXT, have a discussion with your students about the environment in which the Thessalonian Christians lived. Thessalonica was dominated by hostile cult worshippers and an unfriendly ruling authority. This city had recently forced Paul and his friends to flee because of the messages they preached (Acts 17). For the Thessalonian Christians to imitate Paul's actions would have been a very dangerous instruction. Still, the Thessalonians had faith. Ask something like:

- **Would it have been possible for the Thessalonian Christians to imitate Paul without getting into danger?**
 - o Answer: Not really. Paul was endangered because of his lifestyle and commitment to spreading the gospel. For the Thessalonian church to imitate Paul, they would need to have similar zeal for the Kingdom of God. This zeal was what got Paul in trouble with the authorities in Thessalonica, so for the local church, imitating Paul was no simple task.
- **Do you think the Christian lifestyle would have stood out in a place like Thessalonica? Which aspects of Christianity would have been out of place?**
 - o Answer: As with much of the ancient world, a lot of Christianity was out of place in the cultures of the time. Love and equality weren't common characteristics of the standard Thessalonian. A religion built on grace, love, selflessness, and mercy would have been very out of place.

THEN, read or have a student read 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. Point out that in this second letter, we see that the Thessalonian church is still suffering persecutions. But even as they continue through these afflictions, their love grows and their steadfast faith is an example and testimony to other suffering churches.

FINALLY, explain to students that imitating the life of Paul, or ultimately of Jesus, was dangerous for these ancient Christians. Say something like:

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- Christians were regularly persecuted for their beliefs during these times. However, we see that even though their lives were hard, their mission was effective. In spite of the danger, the Thessalonians were able to spread the gospel and bring more people to know Jesus. We are blessed to avoid the same persecutions ancient Christians endured, but the world still isn't very receptive to our message. Imitating Jesus can lead to rejection, but it can also lead some to Jesus.

Ask if there are any questions, then transition into *The Last Word*.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To encourage students to live like Jesus in order to draw others closer to Him
- **Set-Up:** A whiteboard, or paper, where you can write down answers.

FIRST, as you finish your lesson, explain to students that just like the Thessalonian Christians, our imitations of Christ will have an impact on those around us. When we authentically live like Jesus, our love for others will pull them towards the source of all life and love.

NEXT, lead your students in a practical discussion about what imitating Jesus in this world looks like. Use a white board or a piece of paper to write down the answers where everyone can see. Make two columns. On one side, list "Characteristics of Jesus we want to Imitate." On the other side, list "Characteristics of the World we want to reject." For example, you might write "Speaking kind words" under Jesus' side, and "Getting angry for stupid reasons" under the world's side. Ask the students to add to each list. Write down their answers as they give them.

When you finish, take a minute to survey your lists. Then, ask some of the following questions:

- **Can anybody here say that they only do the things in the Jesus column, and completely avoid all of the things in the world column?**
 - Answer: Of course not!
- **Does anybody know someone who really lives out the stuff under Jesus? What is different about them? Is their difference noticeable? Why?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **We'll fail now and then, and our actions will belong on the world side of this column rather than the Jesus side, but how can we begin to move more towards Jesus and away from the world?**
 - Answers will vary. Some examples include spending time with more mature believers, Bible study, prayer, worship, etc.

THEN, explain to the students that when we live like Jesus, people can begin to know Jesus through our actions. There are so many people in this world who don't know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. They don't have to share specific names, but ask your students to think of someone in their life who needs to come to know Jesus. This might be a classmate, a relative, a friend, a co-worker, or a neighbor. When they have someone in mind, ask them to think about how their actions towards that person have shown Jesus. Have they participated in sinful activities with that person? Have they been rude or mean to them? Have they ignored their needs, focusing instead on more selfish matters? If so, how, then, will that person come to know Jesus when Christians act just like they do?

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Lead your group in a discussion about how we can take those things under the Jesus side of our lists and live in a way that impacts others. Students identified a specific person in each of their lives that they need to reach, now how can they be intentional about sharing their faith through action and word?

FINALLY, end your lesson by stressing to your group that the way they live their lives matters. When they live imitating Jesus, they will draw others to Him. Say something like:

- **It is very clear throughout the Bible that God cares how we act. He wants us to strive after Him. This isn't just for our own good, but for the good of the world. Living and loving like Jesus is the remedy for our world in need of a Savior. We can't be Jesus; we're not enough. But when we try to imitate Him and live our life like He did, others will see. They will see the Jesus we all need to know.**
- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the **Social Media** guide to stay in touch with students via text or Instagram, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.