

INTRO

- What is one challenge that you are already facing only a couple of months into the new year?
- Are you anticipating the rest of the year to be an easy one? Why or why not?
- Pastor Pavlo shared with us the difficulties in Ukraine right now. How has his faith challenged you in yours?

READ

Flourishing is often associated with success, ease, and comfort, but Scripture shows us that true flourishing happens even in difficulty. The church in Thessalonica faced persecution, yet Paul recognized their growth in faith.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 – *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 3:5 – *For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.*

1 Thessalonians 1:8-9 – *The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*

REFLECT & RESPOND

What convinced Paul of the steadfast faith of the new church was the fact that they had turned from

trusting idols to trusting in God. In their day, that was extremely costly.

The Roman empire was an example of an external idol that the Thessalonian believers turned away from. They confronted the glory of Rome and the insistence that “Caesar was Lord” and declared “Jesus is Lord.” In some cases, that declaration cost the early Christians their lives.

*Qu: What might be some external idols in our day?*

We also need to turn from our internal idols. Centering your life and identity on: spouse or partner, family & children, work & career, money & possessions, pleasure, gratification, & comfort, relationships & approval, a noble cause, religion & morality are few examples.

*Qu; Have you identified the idols of your heart?*

The problem with external and internal idols is that they promise us freedom, but produce bondage.

*Qu: How does turning from idols lead to true flourishing?*

*Qu: What are some bondages that idols may produce? (This is a deep question).*

PRAY

- Pray for our church to be a church turning from idols to trusting in God

*Qu: The Thessalonians’ faith was known everywhere. If someone looked at your life, what would they see?*

- Pray for ongoing growth and transformation in our lives