

Keeping Thessalonica

Paul's Patrons Series: Book 2 — Book Club Discussion Questions

1. Persis begins the story grieving not only Mistress Dalia's death but also the silence of a household that seems to move on without her. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18). How does the novel show Adonai drawing near to Persis in her seasons of deepest grief? Where have you experienced God's nearness in loss?
2. During Purim, Persis hears the story of Esther, an orphaned foreigner who became a daughter and a deliverer. Master Aristarchus nearly names what Persis has become before catching himself: “An orphaned Jewess rose to the Persian throne. You, an orphaned Persian, became...” How does the novel use Esther's story as a mirror for Persis's own journey toward identity and belonging? Read Esther 2:7 and 4:14. How does Mordecai's challenge, “Who knows whether you have not come for such a time as this?”, echo in Persis's life?
3. Paul's synagogue teaching draws heavily from Isaiah 53, presenting Jesus as the Suffering Servant. Yet Master Aristarchus pushes back: “Where is the victory in a dead servant?” (See also 1 Thess. 4:14.) How does the novel gradually answer that question through the lives of Tirza, Gaius, and Persis herself? In what ways does suffering and steadfastness become its own kind of victory in the story?
4. Timothy tells Persis the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:13–14), explaining that Jesus waited specifically for her, a woman excluded by society, and offered her living water. How does this story mirror Persis's own experience of being seen and sought by God? Paul later writes to the Thessalonians that they were “beloved by the Lord” and “chosen” (1 Thess. 1:4). What does it mean to you that God's choosing is not based on status, heritage, or usefulness?
5. Paul teaches in the synagogue that God sent His Son “to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters” (Gal. 4:4–5). He looks directly at Persis when he says “daughter.” Why does this single word carry such enormous weight for her? How does the novel contrast earthly adoption, Mordecai and Esther, Mistress Dalia's hidden longing, with the divine adoption Paul proclaims? What does it feel like to be called a daughter of God?
6. Tirza dies proclaiming “Jesus is King” in the marketplace, refusing to deny Him even as stones fly. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians: “Admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the

weak, be patient with them all” (1 Thess. 5:14). In what ways does Tirza embody this community ethic even in her final moments? How does her death both shatter and deepen Persis's faith? Where in your own life have you been called to encourage those who are fainthearted?

7. When a forged letter claiming to be from Paul declares that “the Day of the Lord has already come” (2 Thess. 2:2), the community falls into panic and doubt. Paul's authentic second letter warns them not to be “quickly shaken in mind or alarmed” and signs it with his own hand as proof of genuineness (2 Thess. 3:17). How does the novel illustrate the danger of false teaching and the importance of testing what we hear against what we know to be true? What practices help you discern truth from deception in your own spiritual life?

8. Persis prays quietly in the kitchen one night, surrendering her chains to Jesus, not the chains her master forged, but those her own choices and wounds had created. Paul writes to the Thessalonians that God chose them “through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). How does Persis's conversion reflect the full cost and freedom of that surrender? How does it differ from the grudging, transactional religion she observed in Master Aristarchus's household?

9. Acts 17:10–12 praises the Bereans who “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Timothy describes this same spirit to Persis as life-changing. Meanwhile, those who drove Paul out of Thessalonica chased him to Berea as well (Acts 17:13). How does the novel contrast open-hearted seeking with hardened resistance? Who in the story most embodies the Berean spirit, and who stands as a warning against the opposite?

10. Paul closes his letter to Rome by greeting “the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord” (Rom. 16:12). From a nameless Persian slave girl to a named, beloved worker in the gospel, how does the arc of Persis's story reflect Paul's prayer that God would “make you worthy of his calling and fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power” (2 Thess. 1:11)? How does her journey challenge you to receive your own God-given identity and step into the work He has prepared for you?

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