



Meadow Brook Church | Spring 2021

life GROUP

Life together for the Kingdom of God



— FIRST —

THESSALONIANS

THE WORK OF FAITH
THE LABOR OF LOVE
THE LIFE OF HOPE



MeadowBrook CHURCH

MeadowBrook seeks to CONNECT people to Christ and His church, GROW them as disciples to be disciplers, and equip them to SERVE through missions, ministry, and worship, all to GLORIFY God.

Christ Centered | Community Driven | Kingdom Focused

FIRST THESSALONIANS

THE WORK OF FAITH THE LABOR OF LOVE THE LIFE OF HOPE

What are we called to do in this life and how are we to do it?

What hope do we have in times of trouble? What happens after death?

Is my salvation secure?

All of these are important questions in need of an answer. If we are not careful, the enemy will provide his own answer to lead us astray and into despair. 1 Thessalonians answers each of these questions definitively with the eternal truth and wisdom of God.

In times of uncertainty, such as the times we are living in now, it is imperative to center ourselves in God's truth and the hope of the gospel. My prayer is that this curriculum gives you opportunity to do just that. For in this grounding, we will know the abundant joy of life with Christ.



Hunter Hindsman

Life Group Minister

Special thanks to Taylor Hindsman, Gary Pettis, Devin Williams, Jacob Beck Heather Clough, Jessica Loyd, Barbara Anne Garrett and Chip Tucker for contributing to this curriculum in either their writing or editing. *If you are interested in writing or editing in the future, email hunter@mbchurch.com today.*

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*All lessons are edited for content and compiled by Hunter Hindsman

Introduction to 1 & 2 Thessalonians

February 07, 2021

Key Background Information (Adapted from Köstenberger)

Author	Paul
Date	AD 50-51; Order in Scripture = Order Letters Were Written
Where Paul Wrote the Letters	Paul's 18-Month Stay in Corinth
Destination	Thessalonica



Background on Thessalonica (ESV Study Bible)

“Thessalonica was the proud capital of the Roman province of Macedonia and had a population of over 100,000. Its natural harbor and placement on the busy east-west Ignatian Way (a major Roman road) as well as key north-south trade routes meant that it was a flourishing center of trade and philosophy. It was a free city and was governed by local officials called “politarchs” (cf. Acts 17:6, 8). Religiously, the city was committed to the Greco-Roman pantheon and the imperial cult. Egyptian cults were also prominent. There was a sizable population of Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5).” Map from ESV Study Bible.

Occasion for Each Letter

1 Thessalonians

After the Jews in Thessalonica stirred up the entire town and ran Paul out, Paul sent Timothy to check on the church out of concern for their faith (3:5-6). A significant persecution broke out among the Thessalonian church—perhaps resulting in the death of some of their church members—and Paul was concerned for their faith. Thankfully, Timothy reports back positively regarding Thessalonians and in doing so highlights a few issues. In his introduction to 1&2 Thessalonians, Andreas Köstenberger highlights what was likely contained in Timothy’s report:

First, some opponents of Paul were questioning his legitimacy and his motives. Secondly, the church was still undergoing persecution. Thirdly, the death of some, from martyrdom or otherwise, revealed confusion regarding the return of the Lord and their security in the faith. Lastly, Timothy likely reported some areas where the Thessalonians were struggling to serve the Lord with integrity—such as sexual immorality and idleness. (Paraphrased from *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown* by Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles, (B&H Publishing: Nashville, TN, 2009), 444.)

2 Thessalonians

Written shortly after his first letter, Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians further clarifies his teaching on the end times, comforting his audience with the fact they indeed had not missed it and that at his return Jesus would fully triumph over his enemies while his followers would be kept secure. Additionally, Paul speaks at length and directly regarding the issue of idleness, an issue that remained unresolved. Note: Some commentators suggest the order of the letters is reversed, but that is not the position this curriculum will take. The canonical order is taken to be the chronological order as well.

Overview of Book

Models of Gospel Ministry

In these letters, we see models of lives lived well—that is by faith in Jesus Christ and for his Kingdom. Both Paul and the Thessalonian church as a whole serve as examples for us to imitate as we follow our Lord. As we study the book, we will see many characteristics lifted up for us to emulate as we seek to be models of faithfulness others can follow as well. Here are some of them:

Paul

- He concerned himself with the approval of God rather than the approval of men.
- He was gentle as a mother in his ministry as well as being encouraging like a father.

The Thessalonians

- They modeled the work of faith, the labor of love, and steadfastness of hope.
 1. They demonstrated their faith in the Word by their lives lived in submission to it.
 2. They were faithful in the trial.
 3. They proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those around them.

Pause and Discuss

Initially, which of these examples seem most difficult for you?

Key Themes

Disciples of Jesus Christ are secure in their salvation on account of and evidenced by the work of God in their lives.

Eternal security and perseverance of the saints are major themes in these letters. The Thessalonians have concern about the state of their eternal salvation. However, Paul highlights God's sovereignty and faithfulness to his promises, grounding one's security of salvation in the work of God not self. At the same time, he points to the Spirit's work in their lives as evidence. A Christian's security in salvation reveals itself in the work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those genuinely saved have nothing to fear in death or in the coming Day of the Lord.

Disciples of Jesus Christ are called to faithfully serve the Lord:

- ***in their personal holiness.***
- ***in their love for the brothers and sisters of Christ.***
- ***in the community.***

The Christian life affects the total sphere of existence as alluded to in these three areas. Our witness is to be maintained in our private living, relationships in the church, and interactions with the surrounding community at large. No area is outside the dominion of Christ. There is no sacred/secular divide. It's all sacred.

Jesus' future return will bring about the fullness of his victory over the evil one and his fellowship with his people.

- Disciples of Jesus live with the comfort of their hope.
- Disciples live with eyes wide open, standing firm in the faith.

Eschatology, or the study of the end times, is a major theme in both 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. While we can glean certain details about this season in human history, the primary purpose of Paul's discussion is "pastoral, not speculative" (Gene Green, PNTC). His discussion on the end times will not answer all of our questions but ground us in our secure hope and show us what kind of lives we are to live as we await the certain return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian Life

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 | February 14, 2021

How do you prefer others to show you their appreciation? How is this different than those closest to you?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Paul opens his letter to the Thessalonians giving thanks to God for their lives of faith. In a world full of so much faltering, it would have been deeply encouraging for this church to hear these words from the apostle who first introduced them to Christ. The gospel was bearing fruit in their lives. Their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope was making a difference, and Paul—along with many others throughout the region—thanked God for it.

The Thessalonians proved to be an example of Christian living to other surrounding churches in the first century and they continue to be such a model today. What can we learn from the Thessalonian Church?

First, the Christian life is hard work.

God saves us freely by his grace through our faith in Jesus Christ, the one who accomplished every aspect of our salvation. In doing so, he enables us to walk in the good works prepared beforehand for us. The Christian life is a free gift, but it will cost you everything. This same Jesus who said:

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV)

Also said in Luke 9:23-24:

²³ “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

Following Christ requires work. It will involve labor that will most certainly require you to endure. However, each of these actions have a source, and thankfully God has not left us to do this on our own. He has given his Spirit as our Helper so that our burden might be light and that we might bear fruit unto the glory of Christ.

Thank God for Your Church Family

Paul was giving thanks for the church family at Thessalonica as he often did for the churches he served. Will you follow his model and give thanks for the church at MeadowBrook this week? How is God working in our church that is worthy of giving thanks for the people at MeadowBrook? Consider taking a few minutes each day this week to give thanks to God for MeadowBrook.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Luke 9:23-24

Romans 8:28-30

Romans 14:1-23

Secondly, the Christian life and labors must be grounded in faith, hope, and love.

I believe the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) captures the author's intended meaning when describing the relationship between "the work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope" when it says:


"We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Christian living is not about having the right works, but rather having the right source from which all works flow. Christian living, like salvation, is a matter of the heart first. How does this look?

1. **Let your work be produced by faith.**

Christians are people of faith—specifically in Jesus Christ and his Word. We are believers. From the standpoint of faith, everything else flows. Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. (Rom 14:23b ESV). So, if you get faith wrong, everything else goes off the rails—see what happens in Romans 1 to those who suppress the truth rather than believe it. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and live by faith in his gospel!

Using your own words and circumstances, write down what you think it means to live by faith:



2. **Let your labor be motivated by love.**

From the wellspring of faith comes an adoring love for God that overflows into a sacrificial love for others. For only if you love Christ, will you keep his commandments (see John 15). If your labor is not motivated by a love for God first and then others, you will falter.

Pause and Discuss

Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-39:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

What is the significance of the order of loves in Jesus' words?

What does Paul's reference to the "labor of love" teach you about the reality of loving others?

How can we continue to love others when they are difficult to love?



3. **Let your endurance be inspired by the hope of Christ's return.**

The Christian life that is produced from one's faith in Christ and revealed in their love for God and others "ends" in eternal life and the reward of Christ. This is our hope. We know Christ is returning to live forever with his resurrected people, and he is bringing his reward with him. We endure in faith and loving works because our eyes are fixed on Christ's eternal kingdom. Show me someone who is embracing lies of the enemy over the truth of God's Word or someone who has grown cold in their love toward God and others and I'll show you someone with a temporary mindset who has lost sight of the eternal hope given to them in Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, God's election assures us of our salvation.

The Christian life is not a perfect life. Thankfully, God's love toward us is not based on our works but upon his grace and steadfast love that he has been showing us from before the foundation of world. We are secure in his love and no one can snatch us from his hand. His Spirit lives within us, and helps us live out the call of the Christian life. How can one know if God has chosen them? Paul's words make it clear: They believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and live transformed. They choose Jesus over comfort, they tell others about the glorious God who saved them, they worship Christ over idols as they wait eagerly for his return.

Are you in Christ? Have you believed the gospel with full conviction as demonstrated by the Spirit's power in your life? Have you been transformed?

If not, Jesus stands today ready to save. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be born again unto eternal life with Christ.

The Glory of Election

God's sovereign work in our salvation is grounded in his love for humanity. God loved first. In his love, he appointed people unto eternal life through Jesus Christ who would repent and believe in the gospel by the calling of the Holy Spirit and thus be transformed. God's election acts together with the responsibility of man, but grounds all of our salvation in the loving-kindness of God—not human will or effort. God's election assures us that the work he began in us will be brought to completion. God has been moving toward those in Christ in love before the foundation of the earth. He's not going to stop now. Rest in his love.

Applying at Home: Parents Pray for Your Children and Give Thanks for Them

Parenting can be difficult some days. Whether it's hectic schedules, the endless stream of repetitive tasks, disrespectful words, fighting, exhaustion... the list could go on. In the hardness, let's not grow weary in parenting and miss how God is working around and in our kids' lives. Let's pray for our children and practice gratitude.

Paul viewed his relationship to the Thessalonians similar to the parent-child relationship and things were not always easy (see 1 Thess. 2-3 and 2 Thess. 3). One thing was clear however: he was praying for them and giving thanks to God for them. He loved them and desired for God to work in them. Godly parents want the same for their children. So, in the chaos, pause. Pray for your children. Only God can accomplish the major goal of parenting to make disciples of your children. Ask him to move in their lives, and give thanks to God for your children and how you see him working and stirring in their lives. Pray and give thanks for your kiddos. You will not regret it.

Respond in Prayer

Take a moment to read 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and turn it into a prayer for yourself and others:

We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
(1 Thessalonians 1:3 CSB)

Living for the Approval of God

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 | February 21, 2021

When has a friend or family member made you feel loved? What did they do to express that love?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Our hope and confidence are found in God, not our present circumstances.

Amid great suffering Paul was steadfast in sharing the gospel to all who would listen. We read in Acts 16:22-24 how Paul and Silas were attacked by the crowd, stripped, beaten and ultimately thrown into prison. There they continued to share the gospel resulting in the jailor and his household repenting and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter where he was, who he was around, or the level of comfort he did or did not possess, he shared God's message of hope and salvation with great joy. How? Because he trusted in the work, power, and protection of God.

Paul is reminding the Thessalonians how God was faithful to him in Philippi, even having been through great suffering, and how God's faithfulness continued as Paul witnessed to them in Thessalonica. Paul is urging the Thessalonians – and us – to look to God for hope and boldness to witness to the lost around them, for he had just written about how they had believed in the gospel Paul shared (1:6) – the work of God. He reminded the Thessalonians how they turned away from their idolatry and eagerly sought the Lord, so much so that word of their faith had spread throughout the region (1:7-9) – the power of God. Finally, Paul wrote about the deliverance, found in Christ, from God's wrath toward our sin (1:10) – the protection of God. Paul recognized that God's work, power and protection found in the gospel message far outweighed any amount of suffering or persecution experienced in this life and he was encouraging the Thessalonians to believe the same.

Notice how Paul is pointing their eyes toward God. It is God who is the source and reason for our hope. It is the will and nature of God that provides us endurance through the trials of this life, and God does not change. We can experience great joy and satisfaction in the Lord, regardless of how difficult or easy our present circumstance is.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Acts 16:16-17:9

1 Peter 1:3-9

Genesis 3:1-7

1 John 1:1-4

Pause and Discuss

What attributes or character traits of God has brought you comfort and peace recently?

How does the subject of your focus affect your response to difficult situations?

Ask the Lord to help you focus on him during the trials of life.

It can sound extra spiritual to say "focus on God, not your circumstance", but what does it actually look like to be focused on God while simultaneously dealing with difficult situations?

Please God, not man.

This sounds like a simple and easy application, but because of our sinful flesh, it can be one of the most difficult to actually apply to our lives. Paul discusses 3 ways our flesh seeks the approval of man:

1. Flattering words

This is more than a mere compliment, this speaks of a heart geared toward praising someone so that person would think highly of him or her. These words are empty and are spoken for the sake of inflating our own ego and reputation with others. Paul was purposeful with the words he spoke. He desired to build up his brothers and sisters with the solid food of God's Word, encourage them with specific ways God was working in their lives, and rebuke them of sin in truth and love. Purposeful and edifying words require more effort than flattering words; however, in the end, they yield holiness and humility instead of emptiness.

2. Seeking glory for ourselves

Paul did not strive to be the center of attention but instead cared for the church in gentleness (v7). A nursing mother places her baby's needs over her own desires. She seeks to nurture and strengthen her child to grow in stature and maturity. As we seek to build up our brothers and sisters' faith and maturity in Christ, may we grow in all humility and gentleness, to the glory of Christ.

3. Finding pride in our titles

The title of apostle would have entitled them to be treated with high regard. It can be easy for us to take pride in our positions, whether at work, as a husband or wife, mother or father, board member, coach, etc. God has given each of us influence to bring his name glory and honor, not to inflate our own self-worth. May our value, confidence, and fulfillment come from being a child of God, one who has been reconciled to God and co-heirs with Christ.

These 3 examples all boil down to one word: pride. This idolatry of self and our reputation leads us to lift up our own name rather than the name of Christ. It's the same sin that led Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit from the forbidden tree – desiring for their name to be like God's, with all the power and prestige that comes with it.

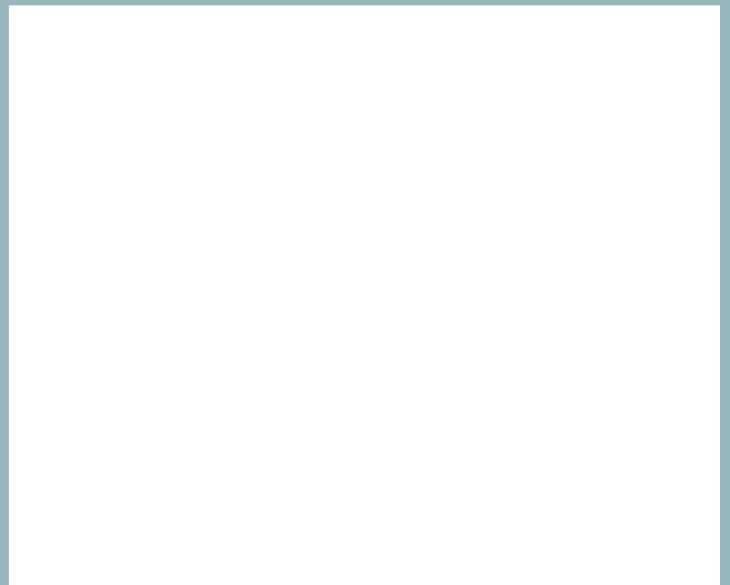
“People-Pleasing”

Jaquelle Crowe Farris TGC

Pride is self-worship and self-preservation at all costs—and people-pleasing is the direct result. Some think people pleasing is a positive trait because they're so clearly concerned with serving others. But that's nothing more than a sneaky sheepskin we put over a wolfish habit. People-pleasing is all about self-satisfaction—fearing man more than God—and seeking the fleeting happiness that comes from man's approval.

The apostle Paul knew human approval was a pointless and prideful pursuit. Thus he could say, “Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

In what ways have you struggled with desiring to please man for your own benefit? Take time to ask the Lord for forgiveness and help as you seek his will and his glory. Write out your prayer.



The Christian life is one of fellowship.

Paul was willing and eager to share not only the good news of Christ's redemptive work on the cross and in his victorious resurrection, but he whole-heartedly desired to share his life with the people of God. His love for God had expressed itself in his love for God's people, so much so that he wrote to them, prayed for them (1:2), knew how to specifically encourage them (1:3) spent time with them (1:5-6), met their needs with great care (2:7), and greatly desired to see them again (2:17). May we be a people who deeply love one another, open up our homes and our lives to one another, that we might know the love and transformation of Christ all the more.

What are some obstacles that keep this kind of affection from happening in your life?

How can you share your life with those in your Life Group this week?

You Have Something to Give

"I know many of you feel like you have little or nothing to give. I am bold to say on the authority of God's word: if you are a Christian, that is not true. You have Christ (Romans 8:10), you have the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), you have the word of God (1 Corinthians 2:13), you have spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10), you are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and you are a fountain (John 4:14; 7:38). This is not a matter of personality. This is a matter of faith. Trust him, and give yourself.

I tell you this because it is the path of deepest, strongest, longest joys. "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)" John Piper

Apply

Hope in God.

Too often we forfeit peace by desiring comfort or lack of difficulty over trusting in God's purpose and will for our life. Our God is ever present with his people. He will strengthen, sanctify and give us endurance as he uses our trials for his glory.

Praise God often.

When we intentionally meditate on the character, power and works of God, we will be immediately humbled - pride has no room before the Creator God. Take time to pray through attributes about God that are awe-inspiring to you. Ask him to help you grow in humility and seek to glorify his name above your own.

Seek to share your life with others.

Invite others over to your house to share a meal. Foster vulnerability amongst your brothers or sisters in Christ. Support others in their interests and hobbies. As we share our lives with the body of Christ, we open up the opportunity to experience and express the love of Christ.

Question: What is the purpose of these examples in the Bible?

These accounts are not only given to us in Scripture to learn about and be inspired by Paul's faith, but they are meant to point to someone far greater – God. As we read and study Scripture, we are getting to know the Almighty God – his character, nature and will. This is why studying Scripture daily is incredibly important. As we read, our understanding of the God of the Bible stretches and deepens; thus, our hope, confidence and resolve to weather life's trials become more steadfast.

Are you reading the Bible to meet with God?

If not, will you start today?

Download the MeadowBrook Reading plan at mbchurch.com

Building Up the Body of Christ

1 Thessalonians 2:9-20 | February 28, 2021

How has someone's encouragement changed your perspective?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9-20 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

How we live reflects who we serve.

As Paul and his fellow missionaries sought to live as Christ lived on earth, they were providing the Thessalonians an example of how to live, minister, and do business in a way that honors Christ. Paul has already connected their example to that of Christ in chapter 1 verse 6, however in this passage we see exactly what characteristics he is encouraging them to imitate – a “holy and righteous and blameless” (v10) way of living.

The only way Paul could describe their living in this way is because Paul recognized:

1. His great need is for Christ (1 Tim. 1:15).
2. His life is not his own; therefore he chooses to live in the way that honors his Redeemer (Gal. 2:20).
3. God is transforming him into the image of Christ, which is reflected in how he lives (2 Cor. 3:18).

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Ephesians 4:1-17

2 Corinthians 3:16-18

Galatians 1:11-12

Personal Reflection

Take time to think about your work life, home life, relationships, and ministry. Would you characterize them as “holy and righteous and blameless”? Which area do you struggle with most? Ask the Lord to help you reflect his holiness, righteousness and blamelessness even more in these areas?

Build up the body of Christ by:

Coming alongside one another in the walk of Christ. (Exhortation)

As we urge each other to love God, read his Word and love his people, we will be ministering in the same way Paul sought to minister to the Thessalonians. His main objective in life was to disciple others in the truth of God's Word. He worked as a tent maker, travelled from place to place, but he used these things as means to tell others about the hope of Christ and train fellow believers in this same truth.

Encouraging one another.

Throughout the first chapter, Paul encourages the church for their faith in God. In fact, the majority of Paul's letters to the churches begins with words of encouragement with specific ways God is working in their lives and therefore affecting their communities.

Jesus told us his church would be strangers and opposed in this world. Therefore, it is crucial for the church to encourage each other regularly. We need to be reminded of truth and the hope of the gospel. We need each other.

Challenging one another to walk in a manner worthy of God.

Sometimes this means confronting someone in their sin. Other times you are simply guiding them back to the will and way of Christ. Generally, however, challenging one another in this way is simply counseling others with God's word through life's many highs and lows, letting the Word be the standard. This requires conscious effort. We must know others and where they are in life. Then, boldly allow the Holy Spirit to use us, as we point to Christ. Through this ministry, the Spirit will shape others into the image of Christ, from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18).

Pause and Discuss

What do these type of relationships look like when lived out?

Why are these relationships hard to develop?

How can we better exhort one another?

How can we better encourage one another?

How can we better challenge one another?

What attitudes should be the defining characteristics of these type of relationships?

Word of God vs. The Word of Men (v13)

The Word of God is authoritative^a, inerrant^b, infallible^c. God has chosen to give us his Word through the written words of people. So, what does that mean for us? John Piper has 3 observations:

1. The apostolic word (the message of the apostles recorded in the New Testament) is the word of God.
2. When it comes to us objectively, we should accept it subjectively in the right way.
3. The way to do that in [2021] is to embrace it as precious, pleasant, and practical, which means, in practice (five M's): to memorize it, meditate on it, make music with it, minister with it, and mind it.

a: Authoritative: God's Word supercedes all else, including my opinions, and is the standard to which my life must adhere.

b: Inerrant: God's Word is without error in the original autographs, 100% true in everything it claims.

c: Infallible: God's Word will always accomplish its purposes. It cannot be thwarted.

Find glory and joy in the faith of those to whom you minister.

I often marvel at how the Lord has ordained for his redeemed people to be a part of others’ redemption. What joy it is to witness the Holy Spirit opening a sinner’s eyes to the glory and affection of Christ for the first time! How wondrous it is to see a friend, sibling, or relative repent of their sin and return to the ways of Christ! It is both our glory and joy to see life transformation happen in the lives of others through our faithfulness to the call of Christ. The beauty of the local church is that we get to experience this glory and joy often. When you serve in the many ministries of MeadowBrook both on-campus and throughout our community, you have the opportunity to experience the abundant joy that comes when faith is strengthened, eyes are opened, hearts are encouraged, and people’s lives are radically transformed as a result of your deposit of ministry in them.

Are you ministering to others?

If so, reflect on those you minister to throughout the week. Thank God for allowing you the honor of being a part of their faith journey. Take some time to pray for them.

If not, think about to whom God might be calling you to minister. If you desire to be a part of the ministry of Christ at MeadowBrook, email hunter@mbchurch.com to see how you can get involved.

Apply

Be students of the Bible.

How can we reflect Christ if we are not being transformed by his Word? God uses the Bible as his primary means of revealing himself. Let’s encourage and challenge one another to grow in our understanding of God by reading his Word.

Be a godly friend.

Choose to have friendships with your spouse, children, coworkers and others that exhort, encourage and challenge each other with the Word of God. You may be the one that initiates the friendship to change in this direction. It may be uncomfortable at times, but the outcome will be an even deeper and stronger relationship than it was before.

Do ministry.

Ministry is not a chore or burden (Matt. 11:28-30). It is laborious and sometimes requires great effort and sacrifice, but it is our glory and joy to join in the work of Christ! Serve Christ in your neighborhood, at your schools, at MeadowBrook, and be filled with the great and steadfast joy of ministry.

Respond in Prayer

Take some time as a group to pray for and encourage one another.
You can do this as a large group or in groups of 2-3, but spend time praying for one another and commit to continuing to pray for and encourage each other throughout the week.

Faith in the Trials

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 | March 07, 2021

What is your gut response to times of hardship?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

As Christians, the overarching goal of our daily lives is to become more like Christ as we submit to his grace, love, and holiness. In Christ, we find strength to combat the forces of darkness with his light. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 describes the reality of suffering brought on by opposition to the gospel. Paul commends a group of Christians who had experienced various trials because of their devotion to Christ and for their persevering faith. Today, we can learn from their example because they endured the same trials and serve the same risen Christ. When we recognize the comparable state of our church today to that of those in the first century, we discover how to respond when facing various afflictions. In the midst of trials, this passage calls us to tend to physical and spiritual needs of fellow believers, strengthen and preserve faith, and deepen love for God and others.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

James 1:2-4

Romans 8:17-18

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

In the midst of suffering, Christ operates through his church to provide aid.

Paul explains that Timothy was sent in his stead to the Thessalonian church to “establish and exhort them in their faith.” Timothy’s mission was important; he was sent to provide aid to his fellow Christians who were beset by various trials that sought to undermine and destroy their faith. Social pressure, deprivation of resources, imprisonment, torture, and execution regularly faced Christians of the first century because of the faith and the church at Thessalonica was no exception. Paul knew the danger these trials posed to the faith of Christians and was determined to protect them through a prominent disciple, Timothy, who provided two remedies for the protection of their faith.

First, he established them in their faith; this entailed the refocusing of Thessalonians on the doctrines of their faith in Christ. Second, he exhorted them in the faith through prayer, spiritual counsel and encouraging words; it was through such practices that Timothy sought to direct the Thessalonian Christians towards steadfastness in faith. These two qualities of Timothy’s mission are applicable today because they are what all of God’s children need from each other when faced with attacks from the enemy.

When we endure trials in faith, the Spirit of God works through them to make us look more like Jesus. And this continues throughout our life—Paul said in Acts 14 that it’s through many tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God in our glorification. When steadfastness of faith has had its full effect, we will be perfect, lacking in nothing. Today, we cling to that old, rugged cross together with our King. But one day, in glorified appearance, we will exchange the old, rugged cross for the crown of life—just as our Lord Jesus did.

In our own trials, the Lord sees to our perseverance and cares for us and in so doing equips us with the spiritual resources required to be agents of his care and consolation for others when they're undergoing hardships and troubles (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-7). As the Church, we must be ready to act in the same manner and zeal as Paul and Timothy to our brothers and sisters. This readiness enables us to practice the degree of service Christ exemplified and calls us to demonstrate (cf. John 13:14).

Pause and Discuss

How can we grow as encouragers?

Where do you need to imitate Timothy in supplying aid to a fellow believer in Christ?

Is there a place in the Church that you feel you could provide aid to others through ministry?

How can we grow in encouraging one another?

“One, let’s continually marinate together in the truths of the Bible, “that through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). The Bible is the most encouraging book in all the world. We’d be crazy not to capitalize on that! In our churches and small groups and homes, let’s memorize the Bible, sing the Bible, pray the Bible, enjoy the Bible, and be encouraged together by all that Christ is for us, according to Scripture.

Two, let’s pool together our personal faith, sharing our stories of how Jesus is getting us through real life in this world, “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (Romans 1:12). Every believer has a story to tell — not only how Jesus converted us in the past, but how Jesus is real to us right now. And the apostle Paul considered your faith as encouraging as his own: “both yours and mine.”” - Ray Ortlund, desiringgod.org

We overcome and grow stronger through faith in Christ.

Despite the hardships, the Thessalonians sent back a good report to Paul, assuring him of their persevering faith. From this text, we learn that the enemy directs all trials, temptations, burdens, and obstacles towards the foundation of our lives: faith in Christ. The enemies we fight daily, our sin nature, the wickedness in the world, and Satan all aim to undermine our relationship with God. It is the most important war in all of history and one the Church body will continually be aligned against until Christ returns (cf. Ephesians 6:12).

The good news is the battle has already been secured. The victory has been won. Christ shares his victory with those who have faith in him. Paul, well aware of this reality, rejoiced greatly when he received the report from Timothy regarding the Thessalonians’ faith. They were overcoming and this brought great joy to Paul. Despite all the difficulties he was experiencing, Paul’s reward was to see those he invested in thriving in their faith.

Just as in Paul’s time, our faith presses toward communion with Christ in intentional love. As the body of Christ, we desire to develop an unshakable faith that withstands trials like those of the Thessalonians when faced with sufferings. Whatever the nature of the suffering we encounter in this life, we can find consolation in the fact that God uses the trial to bring about a greater steadfastness of faith that allows us to experience his love and grace in greater ways we could not have foreseen.

Pause and Discuss

Where does your faith need strengthening?

How has the Lord increased your faith through trials you have experienced?

It is through love for God and man that we prove ourselves in trials.

Paul's admiration and affection for the church at Thessalonica is evident by his desire for God the Father and God the Son to direct his path towards the Christians there. Even though he had received a positive report regarding their steadfastness in faith, he asked the Lord for one particular work of grace: that they abound in love to one another and to all. This love he's calling them to has the same end in mind as that of enduring faith: accomplishing the Lord's will and glorifying him in the face of hardships.

Some five years later after Paul penned this epistle, he went on to write 1 Corinthians and at the end of chapter 13 he concludes with the profound instruction, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." For the suffering Christian, being able to love in the face of such intense hardship serves as one of the greatest weapons in our fight for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Though we might be beset by various trials at times and tempted to become bitter with the circumstances, our love for God and others grounded in our faith and hope in Christ helps us to discover meaning and reward through the sufferings we endure. Whatever the trial, being intentional in love towards all is a small task when considering the great reward and glory that awaits us on that day with Christ (Romans 8:17-18).

Apply

Pursue those in your life who are in need.

Life can be incredibly occupying and distracting at times but when there's someone we know who is undergoing some sort of trial or affliction we should not let our other obligations take our attention away from their need. They would benefit from our establishing and encouraging of them.

Cultivate strong faith so as to be ready to always stand firm in Christ.

The Lord is our rock, fortress, and deliverer, (Psalm 18:2). By faith, we grow in greater intimacy and connection to Him. After this realization, why should we then neglect such an important and glorious duty? Through prayer, Scripture reading, worship, service and other edifying tasks we're able to build our faith in Christ and prepare ourselves to respond with that faith when life takes tumultuous turns.

Be intentional in love towards others as Christ was to us.

Just as Christ loves us to the fullest measure and gave His life for us. We are called to act in this same love. This love is quite possibly our greatest weapon in advancing the Kingdom of Christ. As in combat, being intentional in love is a way to remain on the advance against the enemy and not be forced to retreat.

Respond in Prayer

Ask the Group: Is there anyone going through a trial in need of prayer?

Take a moment to pray for one another.

Sanctifying Purity

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 | March 14, 2021

Have you ever wondered what the will of God was in a situation?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

As Christians, we are being made pure as we abound in the grace merited to us by the atoning work of Christ. This spiritual growth is not a theoretical concept but a living reality for those indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Through this process of sanctification, God helps us attain the holiness He expects of us. In this passage, Paul soberly reminds us of a crucial area in the sanctification process: sexual purity. As Christians, we're called to obey the will of God through all parts of our lives, and this includes the realm of sexuality.

Sexual immorality is displeasing to God.

Paul exhorts the church at Thessalonica to grow in their communion with Christ through their obedience to his commandments. This is pleasing to God and is the process of sanctification. Sanctification means "to be set apart" in the Greek and describes an activity happening within the believer who is being sanctified. Paul is not calling the Thessalonians to a one time act or a sporadic sequence of acts, but continuous abiding in a lifestyle, by which a distinguishing mark is left on their lives. Paul further specifies his instruction to one particular area: abstaining from sexual immorality.

Scripture repeatedly makes clear the Lord's opposition to sexual immorality and the harm it inflicts on those involved. As in all things, the Lord has an intended design and purpose for our sexual capabilities in the context of marriage between one man and one woman. (Genesis 2:21-24) Sin seeks to disrupt the entire created order as God originally designed it, including sexuality. Sexual immorality manifests itself in various forms: adultery, pre-marital sex, pornography, homosexual behavior, etc. however they all stem from the same sin that seeks to distort and pervert what God intended to be beautiful and edifying for humanity. Although no one has lived perfectly in this regard, through Christ we are made new and redeemed from the grip of sexual immorality, as well as set free from its shame. Now by the Spirit's power, we can pursue and live in the purity of Christ.

Pause and Discuss

"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." - C.S. Lewis

What is C.S. Lewis trying to say?

How does it apply to this topic?

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Matthew 5:27-30

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Ephesians 5:3

God's will for your body is purity and honor.

God's vision for our bodies is that we would control them with purity and honor. Your body is God's vessel. No matter what has happened in the past, God cares for and has glorious purposes for your body. What this means is that sanctification is not only spiritual, but physical as well. God wants us to be set apart in body and spirit. Since sexual immorality is done with our vessel (the body), when we sin sexually we dishonor what God has made honorable.

In practice, living set apart in body and spirit is twofold: (1) abstain from sexual sin, and (2) view your body as something dedicated to the Lord and consecrated to Him. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) The opposite course to this is what Paul calls in v. 5 "passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God" which is frequently condemned throughout Scripture as outside the will of God. (Ephesians 5:3; Galatians 5:19; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 2:11) As we come to reflect on how one is to walk in faith with Christ and pursue his will, it is impossible for us to profess devotion to Christ and sin. These are mutually-exclusive. It's impossible to hold them both at the same time. God's will for us is to be separate from such sinful practices and remain committed to the sanctification that is leading us to our glorified future existence.

Pause and Discuss

Many might think that what we do with our bodies has no effect on our spirits, but that simply is not true. How does this passage change the way we live and consume entertainment?

"Holiness is the royal road to happiness.
The death of sin is the life of joy."

Charles Spurgeon

Reflect the Holiness of God.

In verse seven, Paul theologically justifies the importance for abstaining from sexual immorality and pursuing holiness. Throughout history, the Lord has made known his holy character in his dealings with humanity, (Leviticus 11:45; Isaiah 6:3; 1 Samuel 2:2). As beings made in the image of God, we are called to imitate his holy character. This call to abstaining from sexual immorality is not one of mere human sentiment, but rather is reflective of God himself and his Holy Spirit

So, when we're pursuing the Lord and desiring communion with Christ, the process of sanctification seeks to reconcile all of us, including our sexuality, to the character of the Lord. As Christians, we will often feel seemingly out of place in a culture exalting sexual immorality at every turn. We should feel this way, and it is not always easy. It will be a difficult fight at times, but we can remain confident that the Lord will see to completion the sanctifying work he began in our lives & hearts.

Holiness and Happiness

Quote by Randy Alcorn

"To be holy is to see God as he is and to become like him, covered in Christ's righteousness. And since God's nature is to be happy (Psalm 115:3; 1 Timothy 1:11), the more like him we become in our sanctification, the happier we will be. Forcing a choice between happiness and holiness is utterly foreign to Scripture. If it were true that God wants us to be only holy, wouldn't we expect Philippians 4:4 to say, "Be holy in the Lord always" instead of "Rejoice in the Lord always"?

Any understanding of God is utterly false if it is incompatible with the lofty and infinitely holy view of God in Ezekiel 1:26–28 and Isaiah 6:1–4, and of Jesus in Revelation 1:9–18. God is decidedly and unapologetically anti-sin, but he is in no sense anti-happiness. Indeed, holiness is exactly what secures our happiness."

Apply

Do away with any hinderance to your sanctification.

Naturally, we're going to come across things that fly in the face of our convictions about sexual immorality. Sexual immorality is constantly attempting to creep into our lives and set up strongholds. As we're being sanctified in our daily lives, we should not make the enemy's job any easier! We should avoid anything and everything that elevates sexual immorality. The cost is too high and simply not worth it. Find those things, remove them from your life, and replace them with edifying activities that are glorifying to the Lord. By doing so, we will grow in the holiness Christ wants for his Church.

Seek the Lord's plan for yourself, in marriage or chastity.

As believers, we're called to be a light in a world that is enveloped by darkness, just as our Lord is light. (Mark 4:21-15; John 1:5) If we stand out and are derided for pursuing purity, we can be assured we're doing the Lord's will. As children of God, we know the Lord is more aware of our needs than we ever could be. So, we can trust him and seek his plan for our lives, especially when it comes to our sexuality. The Lord does not want to do away with sexuality. He wants us to experience it in its fullest and richest expression as he designed it for the sacred bond of marriage. Wherever you are in life, strive to do the Lord's will with your body and persist in the pursuit of holiness.

Excerpt from DesiringGod Article: "How Not To Fight Pornography" by David Briones

"Pornography not only hurts you. It severely hurts others. It dehumanizes real people into images for one's own sexual gratification, and it completely "destroys life-sustaining relationships" (The Global Sexual Revolution, 127). You lose interest in your spouse. You emotionally distance yourself from your family. You lose your ability to love. You cause your spouse to leave you. You entertain a false view of sex no one can meet. You develop a degrading image of the opposite sex. You become a recluse who can't wait to see pornography one more time. Please don't be deceived, Paul continues: "the Lord is an avenger in all these things" (1 Thessalonians 4:6)...

Paul brings us under the word of command (what God requires of us) and the word of promise (what God has done in Christ, is doing by his Spirit, and will do for us in the future). Fighting against pornography therefore involves four steps:

1. We receive the will of God for our lives, to abstain from pornography.
2. We recognize our inability to fulfill that command apart from our utter dependence on God.
3. We embrace the promises of God's word — promises that increase our affections for Christ and the greater cause of the gospel.
4. Then being enabled by the same one who raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11), we work out our salvation by hating pornography — all the while knowing it is God who wills and works for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12–13).

Too many Christians fight sexual sin ineffectively. They either focus on their internal struggle with little or no concern for the external (i.e. internet blockers, accountability programs, etc.). Or they focus on their external struggle with little or no concern for the internal. Our battle plan should consist of both. We need our internal affections to drive our external battle against pornography. It's the only way to slay this beast.

Sexual sin is such a grave threat to the church today, and it will not go down without a long, drawn-out fight, as if eternity were at stake — because it is."

Full Article: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-not-to-fight-pornography>

If you are struggling in this area, do not fight alone and do not wait until it's too late. Talk to your Life Group leader or reach out to one of our ministers today.

The Discipline of Excelling

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 | March 21, 2021

How important is one's reputation? What's the power of a good or bad reputation?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love of the brethren throughout Macedonia, then urges them to excel still more. He makes them aware of the hindrances that could compromise the unity needed within the church for genuine Christian service, and that their unity in love and holiness would empower their witness in everyday life. This raises the question for us: how can we excel in the power and love of Christ?

Practice Love: A Prerequisite to Excelling

Early in this chapter, Paul confronts the immorality that was creeping into the church from the surrounding culture in Thessalonica. In this section, he commends them for their love, having already spoken in his opening words of their work of faith, labor of love, and their steadfastness of hope resounding forth to other regions. He even goes so far as to say they did not need anyone to write to them on that subject. What a commendation from the great apostle! The Thessalonian church was the model for loving service and faith in the church. They did not just talk about love. They practiced it.

Likewise, we are to practice the love of God by humbly serving those around us in everyday life—our family, co-workers, neighbors, and beyond. God has created and gifted each and every Christian with spiritual gifts to practice within the church body so the family of God might be encouraged, supported, and unified as we work together for the glory of God.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Romans 12:9-21

Colossians 3:11-17, 22-25

Genesis 1:26-2:15

Jeremiah 29:1-7

Pause and Discuss

In your own words, what does it mean to practice love?

“Learning to love is hard and we pay dearly for it. It takes hard work and a long apprenticeship, for it is not just for a moment that we must learn to love, but forever.” - Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Paul's Interjection: I urge you to excel still more.

It takes time and energy to excel in anything. A person will devote hours practicing and learning the necessary skills so that when the opportunity comes, they will be ready to succeed. There are athletes, musicians, and other gifted people that are considered as having excelled because of what they have accomplished. However, that is merely the end product. Before their accomplishments, there was a time of preparation. The repetition, education, and on-the-job training is a part of the process. Paul was not an idle man when it came to ministry. He was constantly thinking of other places to spread the gospel and establish new churches. He also longed to encourage the churches he had already established. Paul looked to do more and more of the God-glorifying ministry to which God had called him. He was sold out.

In the Christian life, God works in us and through us by His word, power, and presence so we might bring glory to Christ by living out his Great Commandment to love God and love others. However, God knows we are prone to plateau and to grow weary in doing well—which is one of the reasons we gather together as the church. When we gather, we are stirred up to love and good works by pastors, deacons, teachers, and other members who encourage us to fulfill our ministry as a church.

For us to succeed at what God has called us to, we must humbly recognize that we are on a journey of sanctification (becoming more like Christ in holiness). We are not as loving as we are called to be. Thus, it is imperative for us to grow in our walk with the Lord so his love might shine through our lives. If we do not grow in love, we will slip into idleness and begin to miss spiritual needs all around us. Thankfully, we have the Spirit who is working in us and part of his fruit in our lives is love. As he works in our lives, let us strive to excel in serving the Lord and one another in prayer, service, biblical encouragement, and witnessing to the lost when we have the opportunity, always being ready to give an account for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

Pause and Discuss

How will you answer the call to excel in love as you walk with the Lord?

What are tangible ways you can show love to your family this week? Your church? Your community?

Walk properly before outsiders.

Christians are called to live differently as lights in the world shining in the darkness. Certainly, this is revealed in our evangelistic zeal, holy living, and love for one another, but Paul highlights some other ways we can be faithful witnesses that could be overlooked. Here are three ways that we can maintain a faithful witness for Christ in this world.

1. Live a quiet life.

Paul tells the Thessalonians to make it their ambition to lead a quiet life. It is hard to think about living a quiet life in the city with all its hustle and bustle. The quiet life that Paul was referring to was more about the inner man—a quiet disposition of the soul regardless of environment. To cultivate this quietness, it's essential to pull away from the loud voices of media, work, and the noise of everyday life that you might be renewed in your minds as you focus on the things of God. Memorizing and meditating on the Word of God as you pursue intentional alone time with God is vital to living steady, faithful, and quiet in this noisy world.

2. Attend to your own business.

When you live and work in close proximity to other people, you sometimes know more about others than you need to know or like to know. Today, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other media platforms strangely recreate a digital version of being in close proximity to others. If not properly consumed, social media can be huge distractions that hinder us from growing and walking with the Lord. It is great and necessary to be connected with others, but we must be careful about the temptation to meddle, gossip, slander, or focus too much on the lives of others. Social media can be dangerously addictive and lead to someone saying something online they would never in person. Whether digitally or in-person, we will give an account for the words that are spoken, typed, or shared.

3. Work with your own hands.

Work is a good thing. It predates the fall and is commanded by God. Work keeps us from being idle, and is the means through which God provides for us and others. Perhaps some of the Thessalonians had grown overly dependent on others or had grown lazy. Perhaps they stopped working because they were waiting for Jesus to return. It is right for Christians to live each day as if the Lord might come at any moment, not in idleness but by working diligently in Kingdom ministry God has given each of his followers both in the church and the workplace. Paul worked as a tentmaker, bible teacher, preacher, and missionary. God has given each of us a vocation to work in this world, and spiritual gifts to use in the building of His eternal kingdom. Let's be diligent to work hard with our hands to the glory of God.

Pause and Discuss

How do these three issues: living a quiet life, attending our own business, and working with our own hands impact our desire to excel in pleasing God?

The world is watching.

In the times we live in, it is easy to see darkness prevailing in our culture, but light shines brightest in the darkest hour. We are children of light called to bear the fruit of the light which consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth (Ephesians 5:9). Remember: God is with us. So, let's seek to live for him in plain sight of the world, excelling in all the areas of the Christian life as we follow our King, Jesus Christ.

Pray the Bible: Take A Moment to Write A Prayer in Response to Today's Passage

Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 ESV

Our Living Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 | March 28, 2021

How important is hope?

What situations require hope, and why should we know our hope before those situations occur?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Discussions about eschatology, or the study of the last times, often focuses on the disagreements. “I’m pre-this” or “I’m post-this” or “I’m a-this.” Sometimes, at the end of these conversations, the main thing has been obscured or lost altogether. The purpose of studying the end-times is not to be right, but to be encouraged by the hope we have in Christ. Even in disagreement, Christians from various perspectives throughout history have come together on key, life-altering truths. Read what the Southern Baptist Faith and Message 2000 confesses regarding the last days:

“God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised, and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.”

The Purpose of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Gene L. Green, PNTC

“Will [the rapture of the church] occur before seven years of tribulation, in the middle of this period, or at the very end? In the haste to answer this question, the real purpose of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is overlooked. This teaching was presented to comfort those in grief by connecting the confession of the creed (“Jesus died and rose again”) of the dead in Christ. This is not the stuff of speculative prophecy or best-sellers on the end times. The text is located at the funeral home, the memorial service, and the graveside. It is placed in the hands of each believer to comfort others in their time of greatest sorrow.”

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

1 Corinthians 15

Revelation 11:15-18

2 Corinthians 1

This is our hope—no matter your viewpoint. This passage testifies clearly and plainly that Christ will return to gather his people to himself so they might spend eternity with him in glorified bodies.

Because of what Jesus has accomplished in his death and resurrection, we grieve loss, but we do so with hope.

Life has its moments of deep pain. Death evokes this kind of hurt in us, and the Thessalonians were feeling the brunt of it. As Christians, we feel the pain of loss the same way anyone else does. Joy in the trial does not mean we deny the hurt or suppress our grief. It is good and right for Christians to grieve—we are not called to be robots. However, we grieve with a hope that far surpasses the hope of getting “back to normal.” There is no “back to normal.” Our hope is that in Christ, our best days are not behind us, but ahead of us. And indeed, they are.

1. Those who die in Christ will rise bodily from the dead.

“[For those in Christ] Death will win its battles, but Life will win the war.” – Michael Svigel

The empty tomb points to two monumental events in history: the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of his followers. One has already occurred. The other has yet to occur, but will. Jesus overcame death in victory and became the firstborn from the dead. Now, all who repent and believe in the gospel are united with Christ and share in his victory over death. We too will rise bodily from the dead.

This is the Christian hope. Our hope is not that our spirits will escape our bodies at death, but that our spirits and bodies will be reunited one day in glorification. Death does not have the last word. Our eternal dwelling place—the new Earth—will be a physical place full of tangible joys, experiences, and excitements to be experienced by real people—the followers of Jesus Christ. We do not become angels or live in some disembodied existence in the clouds but are resurrected to enjoy Christ in his new Creation as his special people. We too will be alive forevermore.

One of the things this means is that we will be reunited with those who die in Christ. This is not the supreme joy of Heaven, but it is a joy of Heaven that encourages us in our grieving. A word of warning, however: Jesus is not a means to an end. C.S. Lewis points out this danger in his book, *A Grief Observed*, when he says:

“[God] cannot be used as a road. If you’re approaching him not as the goal but as a road, not as the end, but as a means, you’re not really approaching him at all.”

Nevertheless, the fact that we who are in Christ will be reunited with those fellow disciples who precede us in death brings great comfort to those suffering the pain of loss.

Pause and Discuss

How does the bodily resurrection change the way we think about death?

How does the bodily resurrection change the way we think about Christian spirituality?

2. We will spend eternity with Christ.

This is the supreme joy of Heaven. Just think: all the things you truly enjoy about life, Jesus created. Your favorite scenery, stories, smells, tastes, sounds, colors, and experiences are all only possible because of Jesus. Just as a Star Wars fan would rejoice at the opportunity to spend time with George Lucas—the creator of Star Wars—we rejoice at the promise to spend eternity with the one who created all things.

Thus, we practice for life in Heaven by rejoicing in Christ above all else. For in Heaven, we will forever rejoice in Jesus Christ in his new Creation. He will be our God and we his people. Regardless of your views on its timing, the hope of the rapture is not about avoiding any kind of trial on this earth, but forever being in the physical presence of our Lord—the joy of joys.

As John Piper says,

“For those who have tasted the joy of Jesus, surely nothing is more compelling than the all-surpassing hope of hearing his final word, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your master’ (Matthew 25:21).”

The city of God is a city of joy. And the joy is the indestructible joy of Christ.”

Voices from the Past: Irenaeus

“The preservation of our bodies is confirmed by the resurrection and ascension of Christ: the souls of the saints during the intermediate period are in a state of expectation of that time when they shall receive their perfect and consummated glory.”

We have a responsibility toward one another to encourage each other with our hope in Christ.

For whatever reason, the Thessalonians needed teaching regarding the hope they had in Christ. After taking a few words describing the hope we have in Christ, Paul gives one command: encourage one another with these words. The joy and hope-filled life will not happen in isolation. We need encouragement from one another.

“Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.”

Jesus

The word translated “to encourage” is an important word in the New Testament: *parakaleō*. *Parakaleō* often refers to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and how God comforts us during the trial. The image behind the word is the picture of bringing someone to your side and helping them along, instilling in them courage, strength, and cheer. It’s lifting one another up in the trenches of life.

We need to foster these relationships in the church. We bear one another’s’ burdens. We weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who are rejoicing, and care for those with the gentle mercy of Christ. We are the family of God. These will not happen by accident but must be intentionally pursued and developed.

We have a command to encourage one another with the hope we have in Christ. Here are some questions to help process this command:

- Do we live in light of our hope in Christ? What are the ways we put our hope in this world, distracting us from the hope we have in Christ?
- Do we encourage others? Would those around us describe us as encouragers? How can we be more encouraging toward one another?
- Who is encouraging you? Are you developing deep relationships where you can be encouraged in the body of Christ? If not, how can you start?

Pause and Discuss

How can we practically encourage one another as a Life Group?

Take a moment to pray together as a Life Group for any in need of the encouragement of the Lord.



“My church family makes my life so much better because they are there for me—whatever the circumstance. When I lost my husband, my first phone call was to my church. I knew that call would be answered with love, encouragement, and support. At that time, I needed a lot of things, but one of the main things I needed was my church family. I am so glad I had them. God watches over us from above and His church watches over its people with God’s love flowing through them.”

Amelia Day

****Reminder we will not have Life Group next week as we celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, the bedrock of our hope. Invite a friend or neighbor!****

The Coming Day of the Lord

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 | April 11, 2021

If you knew Jesus would return a week from today, how would you spend this week?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

The Day of the Lord is coming.

Paul continues discussing the end-times by referring to the Day of the Lord and the sudden nature of its timing. The Day of the Lord is an event referred to repeatedly throughout the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testament writings. The ESV Study Bible simply defines the Day of the Lord as “the great and terrible day when Yahweh will intervene to punish the disobedient and to save the faithful.” (See Isaiah 13:6-9, Zechariah 14:1-9, 1 Corinthians 1:4-8, & 2 Peter 3:1-13)

The Day of the Lord is the hope of the redeemed and the dread of Satan and his followers. For those in Christ, it is the day of Salvation. For everyone else, it is the day of wrath. The world can and will deceive itself into a false sense of peace and security that will crumble so that,

the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, [will hide] themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Revelation 6:15-17, ESV)

Regarding the Day’s timing, Paul borrows language from Jesus’ “Olivet Discourse” and declares that the Day will come like a thief in the night. However, Paul makes a distinction that it will be like a thief—unexpected and unwelcomed—only for those lost in their sins. For those in Christ, the children of the day, the Day of the Lord will be sudden but welcomed and long-expected (v.4). As commentator Gene Green points out,

“The apostle never argued that there would be no signs before the end (see 2 Thess. 2:1-4); he only wanted to say it would be impossible to set the time of this event. This day should not surprise the church, although even believers do not know the ‘when,’ because they should always be prepared. Although they do not know when the day will come, they will see it and they will be ready.”

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Mark 13

Matthew 7:21-27, 28:18-20

2 Peter 3:1-13

Hebrews 11:1-12:2

Pause and Discuss

In your own words, what does it mean to be prepared for the Day of the Lord? What does such a person’s life look like?

In Christ, you are children of light and called to be ready for the Day of the Lord.

Contrasting the disciples at Thessalonica with the world, Paul calls them children of light, children of the day. He is reminding them of their new identity in Christ that is revealed in transformed living grounded in the gospel hope (vv. 5-10). This new nature reveals itself in part by one's preparedness for the Day of the Lord.

When it comes to being prepared for the Day of the Lord, you might have in your head images of charts, news from the Middle East, and bunkers, but that is not what Paul is going for in this passage. This passage teaches us that the church shows its readiness through their sober-minded, faithful lives of love and hope. Here are three specific ways the church can be ready for the Day of the Lord.

The Purpose of Eschatology | Gene Green

"The purpose of this whole discussion of this theme [of the end-times] is pastoral and not speculative... The teaching about final events is meant to inform and encourage [the church] in their daily life and conduct. Clear thinking about the end is designed to help [the church] live as true Christians in the present."

1. Stay awake.

In Mark 13, Jesus closes his teaching with these words:

³² "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake." (Mark 13:32-37, ESV)

Paul, using this same imagery, breaks down people into two categories: those awake and those asleep. Those asleep are still dead in their sins as reflected in the spiritual lethargy marked by toleration of sin and complacency toward the things of Christ. Those who will be awake at the Lord's coming are those who have believed in the gospel as revealed in their spiritual vitality and holy living.

Does your life reflect one who is asleep or awake?

Reflect

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21, ESV)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:10, ESV)

Which Kingdom are you living for?

What does the evidence of your life say?

2. Be sober-minded.

The other contrast given by Paul is sobriety and drunkenness. Those in Christ think clearly and are controlled in their living as opposed to those stumbling through life, deceived by their own perceptions.

Christians develop this sober-minded living by putting on the armor of God. Our faith in Christ, love for God and neighbor, and hope in the fulfillment of our salvation protect us from the attacks of the enemy and from getting too entangled in the cares of the world. This triad of Christian virtue guides the believer so he can think and walk clearly in this world.

These guiding virtues and clarity of thought are grounded in none other than the gospel itself. In Christ, we are destined for salvation, not wrath. We will spend eternity alive in bodily fellowship with Christ, not cut off from God in utter darkness. This message of hope changes the way we view everything. We are now set free from that which used to enslave us and see all things in light of eternity and the Kingdom that is to come, and indeed is here already. We are transformed. We who were drunk on the lies of Satan and the cares of this world now enjoy sobriety.

Pause and Discuss

In what areas of your life do you struggle to maintain a gospel-centered and eternal perspective?
Why are those struggle areas?

3. Encourage and build up one another.

As in the previous section, Paul intends for the message of the Day of the Lord to be a message of encouragement and upbuilding to the church. As the church, we are called to help others be prepared for the Day of the Lord by encouraging and exhorting one another. In fact, this is one of the primary reasons we gather weekly as a church family, which is why the author of Hebrews says,

²⁴ Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25, ESV)

Avoid “The Dating Game” and Those Who Play It

No one knows when Jesus is returning, though many have sought to predict it. In studying the end-times, avoid teachers who predict the date of the Lord’s return. They do not know what they are talking about. Avoid the temptation to personally try and figure out when exactly Jesus is going to return. Simply live each day as if it’s today.

God wants to Be with You

If you are in Christ, Jesus died so he might have eternal, glorified fellowship with you. Do not miss that. The Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, wants to be with you. He delights in you.

The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

(Zephaniah 3:17 ESV)

The Christian Community

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 | April 18, 2021

Why is it hard to love people well?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Having rejoiced over their faith, Paul still needed to address a few issues in the church at Thessalonica. Some in the Thessalonian church had started dishonoring their pastors, resisting their admonishments from the Scriptures. Church conflict was a reality threatening the integrity and effectiveness of the church. Knowing the importance of orderliness, Paul made his appeal to the Thessalonians to embrace their leaders and pursue peace—both inside and outside the congregation. Resting in God's faithfulness to sanctify them, Paul assured the disciples that God would make them ready for their Lord's soon return.

Although ordinary people, God gives pastors for the benefit of the church. They deserve respect and high esteem, “because of their work.”

The people of God should honor their leaders. This certainly includes the pastors and ministers God has given the church. Pastors aren't a special class of Christian, but servants called by God to serve and build up the church. God-honoring pastors work hard to rightly divide the word of truth and labor lovingly on behalf of the people that they might lead them well as under-shepherds following after the Good Shepherd—Jesus Christ.

In our flesh, it's easy to think less of those God has called to lead, but also easy to see in faith that God has chosen pastors to shepherd and equip the body of Christ. Our job as church members is to respond well to their leadership, neither blindly following nor constantly grumbling. In doing this, it makes the pastor's job a joy so that the whole congregation benefits. How do we do this? This passage gives three simple charges:

1. **Respect them.**
2. **Esteem them very highly in love.**
3. **Pray for them.**

Which pastors/teachers of God's Word have made an impact on your life? If you feel led, let them know! How can you tell a true church leader from someone who doesn't belong in the pulpit?

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Ephesians 4:1-17

1 Corinthians 1

John 17

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Ephesians 4:11-14 ESV)

Pursue peace in the church.

Paul instructs the Thessalonians to “be at peace among yourselves,” forbidding anyone from seeking out vengeance. This lasting peace is possible because the “God of peace” is at work in them. Paul’s statement “always seek to do good to one another and to everyone” indicates that believers are to go beyond merely avoiding the harm of others. We move intentionally toward others that we might do good for them. Take a moment and reflect upon the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and the peacemaker Jesus proved to be. By his Spirit, Christ now lives in his people and empowers them to do good unto others as they would have done unto him. So, by God’s grace and power, pursue peace in the church and do good to all people—believers and unbelievers—as was modeled by Jesus.

If you look ahead to Paul’s closing charge to greet one another with a “holy kiss,” it certainly stands out to us reading today as odd. While this greeting is somewhat bound to the culture of the original audience, it still says something about the unity and affection that ought to exist among Christ’s true followers. Remember: when Jesus established the church, he established them as a holy family with God as their father. May we love and serve one another as the family of God.

“And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, Jesus said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’”

Matthew 12:49-50

Pause and Discuss

What are some things that might keep you from pursuing peace with fellow believers who have, in your view, wronged you?

How can we pursue peace in those moments?

6 Marks of Gospel-Centered Unity in the Church | By Darrin Smith

“When we lose unity within the church, it’s usually because something has become more important to us than the risen Jesus. And, in any church with sinners—which, of course, is every church—conflict will exist and achieving resolution is often difficult... Unity in the church is not something we should ever take for granted. We’re called to do both: contend earnestly for the faith and be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-6). “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him” (1 Cor. 3:17). Guard the unity of your church; it doesn’t ultimately belong to you. Paul then gives us at least six reasons for the church to seek unity in the midst of blessings.

1. Gospel-centered unity showcases Christ.(1 Cor. 1:13, Rom. 15:7)
2. Gospel-centered unity elevates the cross. (1 Cor. 1:17)
3. Gospel-centered unity conveys humbleness. (1 Cor. 1:26-27)
4. Gospel-centered unity demonstrates spiritual maturity. (1 Cor. 3:1-4)
5. Gospel-centered unity reflects submission to God. (1 Cor. 3:21-23)
6. Gospel-centered unity comes from treasuring God’s promises.”

Read full article at:

<https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/6-marks-of-gospel-centered-unity/>

Not everyone is in the same location in the race of faith, so abound in grace.

Paul states in Romans 15 that “we who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” Back in 1 Thessalonians 5, he advocates the same exact treatment for those that have come to lag behind in the “race of faith.” Here are his statements on how best to help them:

1. **Admonish the idle.** The Greek word for “idle” means undisciplined or insubordinate. These people need to be challenged in love to live self-controlled lives yielded to the Spirit. Paul specifically addresses this group in his second letter to the Thessalonians. Among the idle, fainthearted and weak, the idle are in the most dangerous place spiritually. They are working against their Master.
2. **Encourage the fainthearted.** We’ve all been in those seasons of weariness where we are just faint-hearted. The ministry of encouragement from the body of Christ is so important.
3. **Help the weak.** Whether it’s a new believer or one deep in struggle against sin, we are to help the weak among us. Jesus did not quench the smoldering wick nor did he break the bruised reed, but he helped those around him weak in faith.
4. **Be patient with them all.** No matter what, demonstrate patience toward all members in the body of Christ.

Pause and Discuss

What would cause a believer to become idle?

Fainthearted?

Weak?

Why would the apostle advocate patience with everyone?

How can this ministry best be carried out in our Life Group?

Pray the Bible: Take A Moment to Write A Prayer in Response to Today’s Passage

¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 ESV)

The Joy and Assurance of the Disciple

1 Thessalonians 5:16-28 | April 25, 2021

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Paul joyfully concludes his first letter to the Thessalonians exhorting them to straightforward action steps such as the familiar charge to “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Each of these applications mirror other apostolic instructions in the New Testament and sum up the victorious life in Christ. Since in Christ, we are provided with all the benefits of his victory, we ought to own and reflect that very lifestyle.

Choose to abound in joy and gratitude.

Everyone in Christ has cause for celebration. If you have lost sight of this, reflect on the glorious message of the cross for moment. Just think:

- Jesus, the eternal Son of God, took on flesh and dwelt among us so that he might rescue us.
- Jesus, being fully man, lived the perfect righteous life in our place and died the sinner’s death in our place so we might be set free from the curse of sin, be forgiven of all our transgressions, and have his righteousness credited to us.
- Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day that we too might be resurrected as he was and have eternal life with him without the sting of death.
- Jesus is coming back to gather his saints and make all things new that he might live with his resurrected people.

Surely, these gospel truths are enough to keep us rejoicing forever in such a way no circumstance could ever steal—no matter how inhumane. This does not mean we like the circumstances, but we live above them as those who see clearly. Believers with eyes wide open to God’s faithfulness and innumerable blessings will always have thanks to offer God for what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do. This posture of joy and gratitude is none other than God’s will.

“Our reactions and attitudes that are uncharacteristic of Christ’s nature are almost always the results of focusing on something temporary. When we aim to understand and treasure God’s eternal purposes and ways, we are filled with gratitude regardless of the current circumstances.” – Randy Gunter

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Philippians 4:4-13

Romans 5:1-12

Luke 6:12-16

John 16

Prayer is powerful. Let’s not relegate it to the backseat.

“Pray without ceasing.” *Pray without ceasing? No one can keep that up!* You’re right, praying without ever stopping would be quite a stunt. However, what Paul means in saying “pray without ceasing” is that the believer should never go through a season - or even a whole day - without speaking to the Lord in prayer. As one intentionally seeks to grow in their relationship with the Lord, the regular practice of prayer will feel more natural, no longer requiring emergencies or formal occasions to prompt the practice.

3 Ways to Seek to Pray Without Ceasing:

- 1. Have planned times to pray with a posture of prayer.
- 2. Take advantage of in-between moments to pray where you might be accustomed to looking at social media.
- 3. If prayer needs come up, stop right there and pray for them with others—even if it’s over the phone.

As growing believers, we may still struggle to understand why prayer is necessary and even essential, since God already knows what we want and has unlimited means to give it. But despite His omniscience and omnipotence, God has commanded us to pray - consistently and yes, persistently.

Prayer is not a spiritual gift for the few, but a vital part of every believer’s daily walk with God. Prayer can be one of the most profound pleasures a man or woman of God can know, but their heart has to be right with the Lord first. When we pray with hearts aligned to God’s will, God brings about his kingdom and will on earth, conforming our hearts more fully to his. Prayer truly is an awe-inspiring and mysterious ministry in which we are privileged to participate. Gratefully, the Spirit helps us in our praying and helps conform our hearts to the heart of Christ.

Pause and Discuss

Why is prayer difficult?
How can you be transformed in your approach toward prayer?

What would praying without ceasing look in your life?

Weekly Prayer Plan						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

The Holy Spirit is actively sanctifying us, helping us discern truth from error.

Paul distinctly warns others not to “quench the Spirit.” Its meaning doesn’t need to be mysterious. If you quench a fire or quench your thirst, you attempt to diminish its strength. Likewise, we can resist the Holy Spirit’s influence on our hearts, or we can yield our hearts to the Holy Spirit and be filled by him. It makes no sense to work against God’s activity, so “let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25).

How can we keep in step with the Spirit rather than quench his influence over our lives? “Do not despise prophecies.” There are two ways this word can be understood. The first is that, as John MacArthur describes, “can refer to a spoken revelation from God, but most often refers to the written word of Scripture. These ‘prophecies’ are authoritative messages from God through a well-recognized spokesman that, because of their divine origin, are not to be treated lightly.” The Christian’s challenge is to accept in faith and practice whatever God’s Word says, whether easy or hard. The second way to understand prophecies here is to view them as demonstrations of “the gift of interpreting divine will or purpose” (BDAG). Since God has revealed his will in his Spirit-inspired word, today this most often occurs through the preaching and teaching of that same Word. If we desire the Spirit to work mightily in our lives, love the Word and the faithful preaching of the Word. The Spirit works through both to build up his church.

Only as we keep in step with the Spirit and love the Spirit-inspired Word of God can we abstain from evil, and hold fast to that which is good. For as soon as Paul charges the Thessalonians not to practice any “form of evil,” he immediately goes on to assign the sanctifying power to the Lord—not the desperate willpower of his people. Who will sanctify? “[God] who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” As we yield and submit to the Spirit, he works powerfully in our whole self as indicated by the comprehensiveness of Paul’s statement: “may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless.” You can’t separate man’s physical and spiritual parts when it comes to practicing righteousness. Your body, emotions, mind, and spirit are all being transformed by God. It’s a total package.

A Christian walking in the power of the Spirit experiences a progressive sanctification, a holiness of life in which the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) are fulfilled. This is the supreme manifestation of the power of the Spirit and is the earthly preparation for the time when the believer in heaven will be completely in the image of Christ.

Respond in Prayer

Take time to close your group time with four people praying through the A.C.T.S. acronym using this passage as a guide.

A. Adore: Take a moment to praise God for the sanctifying work he is doing in you and his people.

C. Confess: Corporately confess the group’s shortcomings in joy, gratitude, and prayerfulness.

T. Thanksgiving: Give thanks to God for the blessing of prayer and a church family, as well as other blessings of God.

S. Supplication: Ask God for help in choosing joy and gratitude, living prayerfully, and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter nine of *When I Don’t Desire God*, John Piper introduces a memorable and helpful acronym for what to pray before reading Scripture: I. O. U. S.

- Incline my heart to you, not to prideful gain or any false motive. (Psalm 119:36)
- Open my eyes to behold wonderful things in your Word. (Psalm 119:18)
- Unite my heart to fear your name. (Psalm 86:11)
- Satisfy me with your steadfast love. (Psalm 90:14)



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