



# 1 THESSALONIANS

*living in hope*

## MY FINAL INSTRUCTIONS...

**Sunday 4 December 2022**

*SERMON TRANSCRIPT*

>> *Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28*

It's my privilege to be speaking to you this morning. Today we are looking at a wonderful passage of Scripture, our last instalment of our 1 Thessalonians teaching and we are looking at Chapter 5 verses 12-28. Today's reading is very practical – full of encouragement and hope and reminding us of what is important as we seek to live our lives for Jesus.

If you're visiting us today either here in the service or online, we have been reading through a letter of the Bible called 1 Thessalonians. It's a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to a very young, recently established, congregation of Christians in Thessalonica. He is using this letter to encourage these young believers how to live by a very different way of living, which was Christianity. I pray that there is something shared today that will either spark your curiosity if you are someone just starting to explore things around faith or encourage you deeply if you have been walking with Jesus for years.

This passage is one of those passages that can almost preach itself. It's also a passage of Scripture that is so relevant for the Church today. That if we can truly grasp its teaching and live it out, it can be life-changing, not just for us, but for those that might get to be watching our lives from the sidelines.

Our passage today starts off with something extremely important: "*Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

There it is folks. It's in the Bible. Clear instructions for us. Black and white. If you don't remember anything else I say today, remember this! And if you haven't memorised Scripture in a while, this could be your new memory verse. Too funny...

In all seriousness, Paul is reminding the congregation in these final instructions and advice how important it is to respect and uphold and love the leaders that God has assigned to lead. I know leaders don't always get it right - we are far from perfect - but when a congregation is willing to love their leaders and hold them in high esteem/regard, to pray for them, to encourage them - it is powerful!

Yes, respect needs to be earned, I agree. Yet as leaders choose to lay down their lives, to choose God's call on their life over other things, and when a congregation can support them and hold them and get behind them, trusting their guidance, speaking to them face to face (not behind their back), doing all they can to make a leader's job easy and enjoyable - then a powerful partnership takes place between its leaders and the people. And the work of the Kingdom can advance in healthy, strong ways.

I love this church. For many years I have been able to sit under the leadership of this church as a young teenager searching for Jesus and meaning in life, as a young adult, and as a young leader needing guidance and wisdom to find my way, and I have come to deeply appreciate and value the leadership of this congregation. And as a leader myself, can I say how wonderful it is when you know the affirmation from your people, when you know your church is praying for you and working in partnership with you and cheering you on. This is what Paul is on about here. He recognises how important this is and we shouldn't be surprised that, thousands of years later, this is still crucial in churches today. I applaud you for being a church that I believe loves and values its leaders.

Verse 13 says, "*and live in peace with each another.*" Let's just stop and think about this for a moment. Seven little words in one verse, yet so significant. This is important to Paul as we see in other parts of the Bible for instance in Romans 12:16 where he says, "*To live in harmony with one another...*" and again in verse 18, "*and as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*" Something tells me that Paul is not just encouraging this new church to be 'nice' to one another, to be civil to one another.

Church, what does it look like to live in peace with each another?

Is it getting through Christmas day with all the different 'personalities' coming together under one roof for a meal? Is it enduring one another and just surviving? Is it just sticking with people that are similar to you so peace can be kept? I don't think so.

Living in peace with each another is not just the absence of conflict (although this too can be challenging for churches) but rather living as people created by God, with all our

different personalities and different enneagram numbers, different ways of seeing the world, our strengths and weaknesses and different takes on some theological issues, and pursuing healthy, positive relationships with one another. It's appreciating and valuing one another. It's seeing each other as a gift. Sure the person sitting next to you right now might be a little different to you... But that's the beauty of the body of Christ!

I'm a mum of three great kids: 13, 11, 9 years old. A lot of the time, I must admit, I often settle for them just being nice to one another. This to me can feel like peace. "Just be nice to your sister..." "Can we just be nice to each other and enjoy this meal in peace..." "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all..."

As if that is living at peace with one another. But is it? Now I know, they are kids, siblings, and it's natural for them to fight and have their differences. But you know what brings me as a mum, real joy? It's when I see glimpses of tiny little small steps of them actually enjoying one another, appreciating one another. And, in that moment, I feel like they are being more than just 'nice' to one another. When that moment comes, I savour it and sit in for as long as I possibly can...

I think in a similar way when Paul says, '*Live in peace with each another,*' he is desiring so much more than us being nice to one another. Let's not value 'niceness' over real, honest, healthy relationships with one another that enable us to live in peace with each other. I have a lot of growing in this area to do but I want to keep pursuing this...

Church, let's not avoid the hard work. Let's talk it out. Go to the person. Let's not settle for superficial 'peace' or harmony. Be reconciled to one another if we want real peace to reign in this place. Real, genuine peace is very attractive to those looking in.

Verses 14-15 read: "*And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*"

Another version says, "**Warn** those who are lazy. **Encourage** the timid. Take tender **care** of those who are weak. **Be patient** with everyone... **Don't pay back evil for evil** but always **try to do good** to each other and to all people."

What is Paul encouraging the church with here?

This is living out our discipleship in very practical ways. Paul urges us to minister to others, to come alongside one another where you can challenge them, speak into their life, care for them. To warn. To encourage. To be Patient.

And in verse 14 we notice that Paul calls on the entire congregation, not just the leaders, to take responsibility for this care and encouragement. All of us are called to do this. I love this. This AGAIN is the body of Christ working together - developing a sense that we are all called to pastorally look out for one another, to speak, to help, to care, to encourage. I love seeing this in action in this church and in God's wider Church. I love when I hear of people meeting one another's needs, standing in the gap, speaking truth, praying.

One of the most beautiful things about the body of Christ - the Church - is that God often makes His presence known through His people: through you and me. God uses His body to become ministers of His grace, the grace of His Gospel, able to reach out to those searching for God or in need of His presence. Never underestimate how God might want to use you in this way for another person.

What might this look like in practice?

**Men:** In your families, in your workplace, in your community... Take opportunities to speak truth into one another. Build relationships that enable you to challenge each other. Our church, our boys and youth, men who are lost or struggling in our community - we need you. Be men that will encourage and hold each other accountable. Go out of your way to build relationships with one another that enable you to do this.

**Women:** We have the privilege of being able to do this for one another. So live in such a way with Jesus at the core of who you are, that when a sister is struggling or feeling weak or shying away from God's best for her, we can speak, love and care for her. And we do this with tenderness, love, compassion and a whole lot of patience. When we show patience to one another, we are showing value - enough value and love that gives one another time to fail. Don't we need that, women?

Church, don't we need that for one another? Church, we need this practical outworking of God in our lives: the body ministering to one another. Let's strive to do what is good for each other...

This all sounds good, right, to do this... But how? We know we can't do this in our own strength, our own wisdom etc. How do we live a life that is in a place to be able to correct, warn, help, and encourage one another?

We can only do this practical outworking of our discipleship (see, again, verses 12-15) because of the kind of life that is described in the next part of the passage. As we look at the inward life (now see verses 16-18) here we see Paul move from how we are to treat and minister to others, to how we are to look to God:

*"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Rejoice always.  
Pray continually.  
Give thanks in all circumstances.

I don't think he is suggesting these as actions to do, a list to tick off each day... But more so as an attitude, an awareness, a lifestyle - like a filter in the way you see and approach life each day based on the fact that the living God is with you and is at work in you.

Rejoicing and worshipping Him...

Praying, being in constant communion and awareness of Him, which becomes like breathing - something we do continually, but often unconsciously...

Giving thanks IN all situations, not FOR all situations, because we know life can throw extremely hard stuff at us...

For those of you who knew Maisie Curtis, you would know that she was known for this. Every time I spoke to Maisie, she was rejoicing over something, praying for someone, and giving thanks to God about something. This was a reality of her life. Every day she would choose joy - her lens each day was JESUS. Even in her last few years, struggling and in pain with cancer, she still chose to rejoice. To see good. To praise God. And it wasn't shallow or superficial. It was a deep-down joy that came from knowing and living with Jesus every day. And it was contagious. You always came away from being with Maisie with a renewed sense and appreciation of God at work, His presence, even in hard circumstances.

This is a lifestyle. that we get to choose to live. It's not something you turn on and off when you feel like it.

What if this is what God has called us to? What if this was your vocation?

What is God's desire for you and for me and for us? To rejoice and worship, to pray, to choose joy and to give thanks in all circumstances!

What is God's will for your life? To live a life like this!

How do we foster this kind of life? What stops this in my life? Or maybe you're thinking, "Why does this sound so great, yet I find it hard to do?" Ever struggle with your good intentions not matching the reality of what your inner life looks like? Me too.

There are so many things we could talk about here - and I don't want us to pretend that it's a nice simple formula you need to follow in order to be able to do this, because it's not.

But I do want to suggest that practices - spiritual practices - can turn our good intentions or our heart's desires into a reality that makes rejoicing and praying and giving thanks, over time, become a natural way of life.

For the last 6 months, our women's Small Group have been working through a book called 'The Good and Beautiful God' written by James Bryan Smith which I highly recommend. After we read each chapter, we were encouraged to do something called 'Soul Training' - simple practices that you try and practice and keep coming back to so they become part of your daily life. Not just something you try once and shelve, but rather become part of your everyday lifestyle. Practices that can help us 'train' to live a life that looks like this description in 1 Thessalonians...

- Can you believe it might start as simple as getting enough sleep each night
- Or building some silence into each and every day to just sit and be with God
- Or, each day, reflecting on what you are grateful for - really learning to pay attention to the small details in your life, the beautiful hidden things that God has given you
- Or becoming aware of God's beautiful creation and taking some time to enjoy it, marvelling at the jacaranda tree, looking carefully at the intricate flower, stopping and listening to the choir of birds
- Or learning how to read the Bible as you listen with your heart
- Or pausing each hour to bring your mind and heart back to God
- Or seeking some solitude where you can just be yourself with God

These are just some of the practices that we can try to incorporate into our daily lives as we seek to be able to REJOICE, PRAY, and GIVE THANKS!

And we all know that whenever we try to build new habits or practices into our daily life, it takes time. It takes practice. It doesn't just become natural for us to suddenly do these things overnight. Maybe God has been encouraging you to try one of these. Find someone to be accountable to.

*"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil."* (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)

Do not stifle the work of the Spirit. Pursue the Spirit in all things. Allow Him to work in and through you as you set out to live differently to the world. Test things against the Word of God - the Scriptures. Hold onto what we know is good - reject evil in your life.

Paul, who wrote this letter, is trying to build a community of followers who are radically different to the existing culture of their time. And not much has changed for us today. We are called to look and live differently to the world:

- To honour our leaders.
- To live at peace with one another.
- To speak truth and encouragement and life into one another.
- To care deeply.
- To help those that are weak.
- To choose joy, to rejoice, to pray, to give thanks.
- To reject evil and hold onto good.

This is God's will for us in Christ Jesus!

To finish our 1 Thessalonians series, I'll read these final words from Paul, a benediction over our church:

*"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it." (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)*