



Theme: Lighting the Way – Paul’s First Letters



“The Most Important Things”

Weekly Memory Verses:

¹⁶ *Always be joyful.* ¹⁷ *Never stop praying.* ¹⁸ *Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.* –1 Thessalonians 5:16-18


Spiritual Formation or Family Activity Ideas for the Week: Many people struggle with change, sometimes even fear it. As a family, name the four seasons, then invite each person to share what they like and dislike about each one. For example, the summer brings about more free time, but often high heat. The winter offers snow for sledding and snowball fights, but unsafe driving conditions. Take a moment to imagine what life would be like if you only experienced one season every day, all year long. What would you like about that? What would you miss? Remind one another that even though change can be difficult, we can often find good in the new experience or situation. Read Lamentations 3:22-23 and Hebrews 13:8 aloud, then thank God for being faithful through all of life’s changes. Pray for a heart and mind open to positive and healthy change.


Monday, October 11 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Romans 12:18 and Matthew 7:12. As we look at how Paul closed his first letter to the Thessalonians this week, we’ll see how his guidance to those early converts echoed Jesus’ teaching and how Paul developed the same themes in some of his later letters. The first two verses of his closing today encapsulated the premise that was contained in Matthew’s later reporting of Jesus’ “Golden Rule.” It sounded simple but is hard enough to do that it bears repeating, which is that we are to treat other people the same way you wish them to treat you.

-  Paul urged the Thessalonians to respect those who are “working... leading... instructing.” Paul tells church members to love their leaders, not to set them on a pedestal, but for the sake of their service in 1 Corinthians 16:16. There weren’t yet formal “appointment” or training processes for leaders, but there were already people who used their gifts in faithful service to others. How does Paul’s guidance speak to you in our more formally organized times?
-  At times Christians seem to think the Golden Rule means no more than “Be nice” in surface-y, social ways. Jesus said that short phrase held the deep spiritual essence of all “the Law and the Prophets,” the entire Hebrew Scriptures. What people or conditions make it hardest for you to truly treat others as you wish they’d treat you? When has someone else treated you by the Golden Rule’s standard? How did that affect you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I wish my thoughts toward others just naturally turned to respect, love and peace. Reshape me from the inside out so that I treat others as I want them to treat me. Amen.


Tuesday, October 12 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15, Romans 12:9-10, and Matthew 7:4-6. Paul loved the Thessalonian Christians, but he was also realistic about the ways flawed humanity shows up even in a group who honestly aim to be faithful. Scholar William Barclay observed, “Verse 14 picks out those who need special care and attention.” He listed “those who are disorderly,” “the discouraged,” and “the weak,” adding that at times they would need to “be patient with everyone.”


 So, Paul listed the “disorderly” (or “idle”), “discouraged” and “weak” as needing special care, along with “everyone” needing patience. How do you think that applies to the ways we minister to people? To what contemporary issues do we most need to apply Paul’s wisdom to our ministry life?

 Jesus used a hyperbolic image (the log in your eye) to remind his hearers that we all have faults, and so we all need mercy. Recognizing our own failings makes us more forgiving toward others. How can honest self-evaluation and openness to hearing what bothers other people (Christians or others) help build relationships that strengthen both of you rather than tearing each other down?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, shape me into a person who can warn, comfort, help and be patient with others. Guide me to always pursue the good for others and for your kingdom. Amen.


Wednesday, October 13 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, Philippians 4:4-7 and Matthew 12:30-32. Scholar N. T. Wright, in his commentary *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*, compared these verses in 1 Thessalonians to, “the equivalents of the little rules of grammar, the rhymes and memory-aids which nudge the mind in the right direction... which Paul has put together so that his young churches will quickly learn the language of Christian behavior.” Verse 19 echoed Jesus’ teaching: the Holy Spirit, not just our own ideas, must direct our growth into the “language” of Christian behavior.


 Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit, who confirms the reality of Christ to us, also changes our motivation and our self-understanding. The Holy Spirit does not cancel out our freedom—in fact, our freedom is intensified—but the Holy Spirit fills us with the living companionship of Christ, as Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10. How has the Holy Spirit’s influence on your life “intensified” your freedom for living in companionship with Christ?

 Visual artists know that often how we frame a picture alters what we focus on in it. Paul urged a kind of framing in 1 Thessalonians 5 and Philippians 4. When we bring the things that cause us stress to prayer, we put ourselves and our troubles inside a much bigger picture, which is the story of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ, and that leads to thanksgiving. What helps you look at God’s perspective on life’s big picture more than any unpleasant little details?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, my goal is to face life every day with gratitude, prayer, and openness to your Spirit. When I forget, please remind me, and call me back on course. Amen.


Thursday, October 14 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, John 17:15-17, and Acts 20:32. John’s gospel said on the night before he was crucified Jesus prayed that God would make his followers holy through the word of truth. Paul knew about that as he wrote 1 Thessalonians, perhaps 30-40 years earlier. He had told his converts in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and 7 that God’s will was that their lives should be dedicated (or holy, sanctified) to him, then repeated it in today’s reading. Living for God is not a part-time, one-day-a-week choice, but a commitment of your whole life.


 Greek verbs based on the adverb “*hagios*” (traditionally translated as “sanctify”) carried the root sense of, “setting apart for a holy purpose.” Even wood or metal objects could, in that sense, be “sanctified,” such as in Exodus 40:9-11. But people, of course, must decide to accept God setting us apart for holy purposes. How can being set apart for a holy purpose shape your ways of living?

 Paul had made it plain that the Thessalonians, similar to us, played a role in living holy lives dedicated to God. In the end, keeping us “intact and blameless” when we meet Jesus, is not mainly our doing but God’s. We read in verse 24, “The one who is calling you is faithful and will do this.” How do you sense God’s Spirit transforming you into a person who can meet Jesus “intact and blameless”?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I marvel that you love me so much that you not only died for me, but that you patiently work in me to change my messy self into one who can trustingly meet you when you come. Thank you, Lord! Amen.*

Friday, October 15 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28, Colossians 4:2-4, and Philippians 4:21-22. Paul’s closing words ran far deeper than just, “That’s all I got—see you soon!” At the start, he assured the Thessalonians that he prayed for them in 1 Thessalonians 1:2. At the end he showed it was not a one-way street and asked them to please pray for him. The holy kiss was a part of worship, for example in Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20 and 2 Corinthians 13:12. And with no copying machines, it made sense to read the letters aloud to the congregation.

 Paul’s closing reflected what he believed about the church. If the gospel meant what it said, then the Christians should still regard themselves as a single family. Paul’s word *adelphoi*, literally means “brothers.” In described the shared working and family life of a close kinship group. How much of a family bond do you have with those in your church? How can you invite others into the family?

 The very first verse of this letter said, “Grace and peace to all of you.” The last verse closed the circle: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.” The great apostle couldn’t talk for long (and this is a short letter) without coming back to the grace of God, the simple yet fathoms deep truth that had utterly changed his life and those of his hearers and readers. What helps you continually bring your own spiritual journey back to God’s grace at the very center?

Prayer: *O God, like the tax collector Jesus talked about, I continually pray, “God, show mercy to me, a sinner.” You always answer that prayer, and I offer you my life in gratitude. Amen.*

Saturday, October 16 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28. This week we’ve worked our way through all the pieces of Paul’s closing in his very early letter to the Christians in Thessalonica. But it seems worthwhile to end our study by reading his closing whole, as his

first hearers would have heard it. You might consider reading it aloud, either by yourself and/or with a group/family. Listen for the love and pastoral concern that fills every line. Try to imagine how it spoke to Christians living in a thriving Greek port city full of people who lived by very different values than the ones Paul had taught them. And receive at the end, just as those Thessalonian Christians did, the renewed, emphasized gift of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

🏰 Sometimes, maybe subconsciously, we begin to think of “faith” as one “department” of our life, separate from “finances,” “work” or “entertainment.” But Paul made no such separation as he sent his letter off. This final list describes the effective functioning of community life. Note how instructions for ordinary tasks mingle with matters of deep spiritual import. In the community of disciplined grace, respecting co-workers and helping the weak are just as essential as praying without ceasing and not quenching the Spirit. Use Paul’s list to do an inventory of the current state of your soul. Which parts are you living, saturated with God’s grace? Are there any that you thought didn’t have anything to do with your commitment to Jesus? If so, how can you bring them into connection with your faith?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, words like “love,” “peace,” “pray,” “faithful” and above all “grace,” aren’t just Sunday words. They are your gifts every day. Weave them ever more tightly into the fabric of my life. Amen.