

The Vine

Week Six: November 2-8, 2008

Last words. As you are parting from family and friends, the last thing you say seems to have some extra weight. The encouragement seems that much more uplifting. Imagine someone is about to go away for an unknown amount of time. They hug you and say, "Now remember ..." The words that follow come from the heart.

As Paul finishes his letter to the Thessalonians, he puts in some last thoughts. It even seems as if his pace increases as he tries to squeeze in his last comments before he is pulled away and the letter ends. Keep in mind this is the last section of a heartfelt letter as you work through The Vine this week.

Day One

Read all of 1 Thessalonians 5

As you read over this chapter, how would you divide the chapter into paragraphs? Do you think verse 11 goes with the beginning of the chapter or the end? Why? This week we will focus on the second half of the chapter which contains a list of commands. Look at the list. Do you think there is an order to the list? We are going to break up the list and look at different commands each day. How would you break up the list?

Look closely at verses 12-13. What three characteristics are listed for those the Thessalonians are supposed to respect? Who are these people in the lives of the Thessalonians? What would respect have looked like for the Thessalonians?

Today, who are the people “over you in the Lord”? How does respecting them look today? In what practical ways can you show that you respect them and hold them in the highest regard in love?

What is the significance that the command to “live in peace with each other” is included here?

Prayer Reflection: In your prayer time pray for those who are “over you in the Lord.” Thank the Lord for them. Pray for their physical and spiritual health. Pray for your attitude as you learn and grow under their leadership.



Day Two

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-26

How many all-inclusive words, such as every and all, do you see in the passage?

What does he urge them to do in verse 14?

Application

Application answers the question, "How does the truth of this passage apply to my life?" Notice that the question is not, "Is the truth relevant to my life?" The Word of God is always relevant to our life. The more honest question is, "Am I ready and willing to believe this truth and apply it to my life?" Application takes place as you are confronted with truth and you respond to that truth in obedience.

Beale's commentary says that the word translated idle or lazy in verse 14 "is better translated 'unruly' or 'disruptive' ... The word refers to military officers who neglect their duty or to an army in disarray and out of its ranks." How does this change the meaning of the warning? What might this warning look like today?

To encourage someone is to give them courage. Is being timid bad? In what ways does being timid hinder spiritual growth? What are some specific ways that help the timid grow in their courage?

Helping the weak seems like a simple command yet is also easily forgotten. Why is it so easily overlooked? Who do you think would be considered the weak in your community? What are some specific ways you and your small group can be helpful?

What would it look like if the entire body of Christ had the mindset to warn, encourage and help for one week? How might the community change?

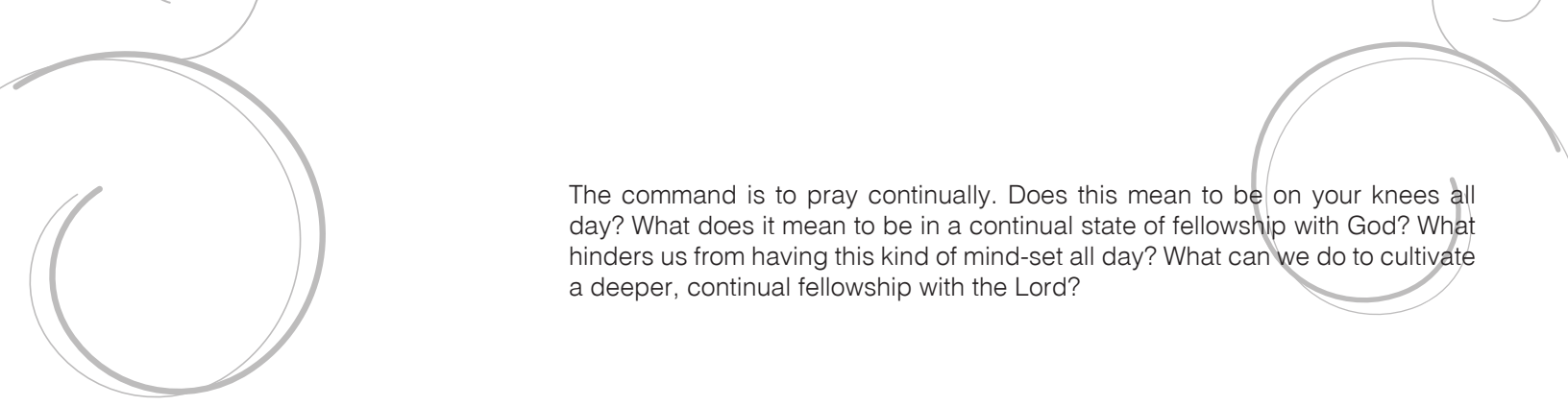
Prayer Reflection: Pray that the Lord will allow you to see opportunities where you can warn, encourage and help today. Ask Him to prompt you specifically. Ask Him for the courage to respond to His prompting.

Day Three

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-26

Focus on verses 16-18 today. The command is to be joyful always. Is that possible? Happiness depends on your circumstances. How is that different from joy? What can you do to cultivate a joyful heart in all circumstances? What confusing lie does the enemy tell you that steals your joy? What should you do about it?






The command is to pray continually. Does this mean to be on your knees all day? What does it mean to be in a continual state of fellowship with God? What hinders us from having this kind of mind-set all day? What can we do to cultivate a deeper, continual fellowship with the Lord?

The command is to give thanks in all circumstances. Does this mean we are to be pleased with every situation even when they involve truly evil things? Giving thanks is easier when we see the big picture which shows God on the throne. How can you cultivate more thankfulness in your life this week?

What are practical ways you can put each of these into practice in your life today? Now stop being practical for a moment. What are some ways we can show a reckless abandon as we walk with Jesus and put these into practice?

Many struggle with the question, "What is God's will for me?" This passage clearly answers part of that question. Work daily to develop more joy, prayer and thanksgiving in all parts of your life. You can be assured that is God's will for you today.



Prayer Reflection: Pray and confess any lack of joy or thankfulness. Ask the Lord for more joy, overflowing joy. Ask the Lord to give you eyes to see the big picture so that you may grow in your thankfulness. Ask Jesus to be in close communication all day. Pray against the enemy who will certainly be unhappy with these prayers. Allow the Lord to flood you with joy and thankfulness even now while you are praying.

Day Four

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-26

Focus on verses 19-22. Two commands here are in the negative. Why might that be? What could someone do to put out the Spirit's fire or quench the Spirit? What is the result of this quenching on the Spirit's effectiveness in that person's life?

How would someone treat prophecies with contempt? This can be done by putting prophecies in too high or too low of a position. What does it look like if someone holds prophecies in too low of a position? In too high of a position?

How does the test everything command go with the previous two commands? How should this influence how we handle any new fad or methodology that sweeps through the Christian community? How do we test anything?


A Simple Kiss

Non-passionate kissing was a common greeting in the culture of Jesus' time. A kiss placed on the cheek, forehead or beard was an expression of familial affection, respect or fraternal affection. Kisses on the hands or feet were acts of submission and self-humiliation. In Luke 7:36-48 Jesus teaches Simon about love using as an example a woman who kissed His feet.

The kiss was also used by hypocrites to feign love in their acts of treachery and betrayal. Proverbs 27:6 advises, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Perhaps the most well known kiss given with wicked intent was that of the disciple Judas in his betrayal of Jesus in his betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26:48-49).

The apostle Paul instructs Christians to greet each other with a holy kiss. The holy kiss was the adaptation of the familial kiss as a Christian symbol of brotherly love between the members of one family in the Lord. It was an authentic greeting void of formality, hypocrisy, prejudice and discrimination but rich in grace and mercy. Peter echoed Paul's instruction when he wrote "Greet one another with a kiss of love" (1 Peter 5:14).





But testing is not the end. What are the two steps after the testing? What good is the testing without the following two commands? How often do we test and then not follow through with appropriate holding on or avoiding?


Prayer Reflection: Pray that the Lord will show you any ways in which you are putting out the Spirit's fire. Also pray for courage to hold on to the good and strength to avoid that which you know is evil. Pray and meditate over these ideas.

Day Five

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-26

Paul asks for sanctification through and through. He also asks for blamelessness. How does verse 24 fit into these requests? What clues does verse 24 give as to how verse 23 can be accomplished? Ask God to reveal to you the areas of your life in which you need to look for His faithfulness to help you be blameless?

Verses 25-27 end the letter with what three commands? This can be a model for your prayer today. Pray for those over you in the Lord. Greet one another warmly and lovingly. Continue to spend time in the Word.



You did it! You finished the entire letter. Skim through all of 1 Thessalonians. What are some of the themes you will remember from your time digging in to the Word? A good thing to do that will help you retain what you have learned is to look again at 1 Thessalonians in a few weeks. Just read back over it and allow the Lord to refresh your mind on what you have learned.

Prayer Reflection: What better prayer for us to pray over our own lives and with our small groups than verse 23-24? Pray those two verses and personalize them. Be specific. Ask God to give you peace in those specific situations where you find it difficult to feel peace. Ask for your whole self to be kept blameless. Lean on the One who will do it.

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