



Building Strong Friendships in Jesus Christ

Bert Allen

Published by Christ Assembly
1360 S. Patrick Dr., Suite 1A
Satellite Beach, FL 32937

www.ChristAssembly.org

Permissions

Your are granted a limited, revocable license to distribute this material through all lawful means, provided that you do not alter the wording or format. Furthermore, you may not derive any economic benefit from such publication or distribution. All rights reserved by Herbert L. Allen, Jr. Please post a link to ChristAssembly.org for all web publications.

All Scriptural quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Giant Print Hardcover edition.

"Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission. www.Lockman.org"

Introduction

I spend time at the beach virtually every day. I try to arrive at 4:00 p.m. to read the Bible, pray and fellowship with my friends in Christ and to make new friends in Christ. I never know what will happen at the beach. I never know whom God will send to see the ministry team at the beach. I thank my friends in Christ for their love, faith and fellowship, which build me up every time I see them.

I became interested in friendship as it relates to discipleship many years ago. Jesus called His disciples friends, and explained to them that He called them friends because He disclosed to them what their Master was doing. He no longer referred to them as slaves (John 15:14-15, Page 1686). So, when I refer to my friends in Christ, I mean born-again believers. Jesus said that unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:1-16, Pages 1657-1658). We become born again at the moment we confess Jesus as Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9, Page 1772). We repent of our sins by confessing that we are sinners, and that we fall short of the glory of God; we change our mind and turn away from sin, and we receive the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 3:23, Page 1762; Romans 6:24, Page 1766). We recognize and believe that God loves sinners like me, and so Jesus Christ died for my sins, paying the death penalty I deserved. (Romans 5:8, Page 1764). By grace through faith I have been saved from the penalty of my sins, eternal death and punishment. I have nothing to boast about, because God gifted me with salvation by faith alone. Hallelujah !

As you read through the following pages, you may become aware that the Thessalonians were superb believers, perhaps the strongest Christians in the New Testament. Yet, they were not perfect. You may conclude that Paul had so many great things to say about the Thessalonians that they were not really like normal disciples. The Corinthians, Colossians, Ephesians, and other local assemblies had greater and more numerous problems. So, why would I suggest that 1 Thessalonians provides great lessons for disciples to learn about building strong friendships in Christ? The truths God revealed to Paul which he recorded in 1 Thessalonians apply to all believers. We can always be thankful that God chose each believer to be in the family of God and that God loves each member of the family. We should notice even in the most immature and unruly believer that they are

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

performing some works of faith, some labors of love, and have some hope for the future. While they may have great problems, all believers have God at work in their lives. We need to build friendships in Christ according to the principles God provided in His words. 1 Thessalonians contains many such lessons, and each lesson enriches the lives of believers who want to be better friends with Jesus, our best friend forever. I regret that I do not practice all that I preach. I must live always by the grace of God. Thankfully, I have focused upon the Word of God, and not my personal experience with friendships, where I have failed often. I found studying the Word of God to be a rich blessing. Focusing upon 1 Thessalonians has helped me be a better friend in Christ. I still have a long way to go with my friendships. I laid out the book as one lesson per day so that you may focus upon each day with a purpose from the Word of God. My words seek to explain the Word of God, but carefully examine all of my words, and hold fast to that which is good. May God use His word to His glory.

Grace to you and peace !

Christmas Eve 2016

Table of Contents

Chapter (Click the Links)

1. [Learning To Greet Disciples Today](#)
2. [Learning to Pray for Disciples Today](#)
3. [Learning To Imitate God Today](#)
4. [Learning To Speak for God Today](#)
5. [Learning To Remind Today](#)
6. [Learning To Endure Suffering Today](#)
7. [Learning To Bless Your Friends Today](#)
8. [Learning To Visit Your Friends Today](#)
9. [Learning To Hear from Friends Today](#)
10. [Learning Directions to Friends Today](#)
11. [Learning Sanctification and Honor Today](#)
12. [Learning the Quiet and Simple Life Today](#)
13. [Learning about Believers Asleep in Jesus Today](#)
14. [Learning about the Day of the Lord Today](#)
15. [Learning To Honor Friends Today](#)
16. [Learning Patience with Friends Today](#)

17. [Learning To Help Friends Remain Friends Today](#)
18. [Learning To Obey Basic Spiritual Commands Today](#)
19. [Learning The Sanctification Blessing for Friends Today](#)
20. [Learning To Ask Friends for Prayer Today](#)
21. [Learning To Greet the Brethren Today](#)
22. [Learning To Read the Bible with Friends Today](#)
23. [Learning To Close with Grace Today](#)

1

Learning To Greet Disciples Today

Discipleship involves learning to live in Christ and entrusting the things of Christ to faithful people. As part of that learning process, we use words to communicate with faithful people. Words require care and attention. We all need to be very careful how we start communications with people, especially with disciples. The first words may make all the difference in how things go. Paul gave very careful thought to the words he used to greet other believers. We can learn from Paul many things about making disciples. As we go through this study of 1 Thessalonians, we will see that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ forms the bedrock of making disciples. Each person must be born again as the first step in discipleship. Our friendship with Christ sets the tone for our friendship with His children. Each one of us must decide if we believe that Jesus Christ died on His cross to pay the death penalty for me. Do I believe that Jesus Christ not only died for my sins, and paid the death penalty for me, but am I also willing to believe that God raised Him from the dead? Paul taught what Jesus revealed to Paul. The Gospel Paul preached came directly from Jesus Christ through personal revelation. Discipleship always rests upon personal faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior. Our faith makes all the difference. Discipleship means that I now want to learn more about living with Jesus Christ controlling my life, filling me with joy, peace and purpose for living, even when I encounter afflictions and tribulations.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means I make disciples of Jesus Christ. Part of the process of making disciples includes communicating with disciples. What we say changes things for better or worse. How we say things conveys great meaning as well. So, Paul used his words to convey spiritual truths, and to build up the believers at Thessalonica. As we study 1 Thessalonians, we will see how Paul expressed his love for the Thessalonians and encouraged their faithful service to God.

Day One

Grace and Peace Today

1 Thessalonians 1:1

"Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace."

Jesus Christ intends to forge the finest relationship with you that you have ever had. Better than your best earthly friendship, better than you had with any of your children, your spouse, your parent, your uncle, your aunt or other relative. He wants you to know Him as your best friend ever. He wants you to know His love that shines deeper into your heart and life than you could ever imagine. He will never fail you and will never leave you hanging. Jesus emphasized what it means to be His disciple in these terms: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26, Page 1426). Jesus claims first priority in our lives, and wants our relationships with everyone to be transformed so that we are His disciple before any other relationship in our lives. Most of you understand what I am saying up to this point. But now, imagine He wants you to have friends like that and you can be a friend like Jesus to other people. All of us need to learn from Jesus everyday how we can forge those strong relationships.

As we read through 1 Thessalonians together, day by day, we will see the kind of relationship that Paul, Timothy and Silvanus enjoyed with the believers of Thessalonica. But most of all, we will see Jesus forging bonds of love among all of them.

When is the last time you wrote an e-mail, text message, posted to social media or put pen to paper for the purpose of encouraging another

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

Christian, especially someone you love? Well, Paul did that in verse one. Paul wrote as part of a ministry team, and he also wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21, Page 1901; 2 Peter 3:14-16, Page 1903). God says every word of Scripture He inspired and those words will not pass away until all of them are fulfilled (Matthew 5:18, Page 1507). We all need to take more time to write our friends in Christ, send an email or text, post to social media, or pick up the phone to encourage them.

Paul did not write just to pass the time of day. He wrote to focus attention upon God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **He wrote to bid grace and peace to the Thessalonians.** Being more like Jesus means that you take the time to be involved in loving relationships with other Christians. Being in Christ means being one part of Christ's ministry team in your home, at work, in your community, in your country, and in the world today. You welcome them with the words: grace to you and peace. Jesus has different teams at work at different places and Jesus may place you into multiple ministry teams, depending upon where you can best serve Him.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we remind our friends in Christ that they are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when greet our friends in Christ with words of grace and peace from God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Application for Today

Today I will look to Jesus and ask Him who should I talk to today, for His sake. Who needs to hear about the grace and peace that only God the Father and God the Son offer to this world? Whom will I build a relationship with today in the name of Jesus?

2

Learning To Pray for Disciples Today

Prayer means that you intentionally communicate with God. Paul prayed for the believers at Thessalonica and then let them know exactly what he prayed for them. Both halves of that relationship really matter. Paul disciplined the Thessalonians by modeling how to pray for other believers. As we study the prayer life of Paul, we may observe that Paul used His prayer life to build up the disciples. We should use our prayer life in the same way. We must also be sure to let the disciples know all about our prayers for them.

Day Two

Mentioning Your Prayers Today

1 Thessalonians 1:2

"We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;"

God intends for us to give thanks for our friends in Christ. Giving thanks obviously means you have something to be thankful about. Do you think about your friends in Christ as people you thank God for placing in your life? Paul taught us that we should be very careful to give thanks to God for our friends in Christ, always making mention of them in our prayers. We should also be careful to let our friends know that we pray for them often. **Making disciples means that you pray for your friends in Christ every day and you let them know that you pray for them.**

How we view our friends in Christ makes a lot of difference in our lives. Do we focus upon the good in them and never see the bad? Do we stare at the bad, and never see the good? What are we looking at with our mind's eye? In order for us to be thankful to God for our friends, we must notice things about them that God has produced in their lives. God works constantly in the lives of our friends in Christ, and we should be very careful to observe those things and thank God for His activity in the lives of people in Christ we love.

Not only must we notice the things God is doing in the lives of our friends in Christ, but we must also take time to thank God constantly for those things. As you begin to thank God in your prayers for your friends in Christ, you will see that you may run out of things quickly. God is working in your friends, but are you looking with spiritual eyes to observe spiritual

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

activity? If so, are you looking every day? Paul looked all the time and thanked God for God's work in the lives of his friends in Christ.

Finally, be sure to tell your friends that you are praying for them constantly, but do not lie. If you are not praying for them, skip telling them until you start praying for them. But, start today to pray and thank God for the friends you have in Christ. Do you have friends today who are telling you that they pray for you all the time and thank God constantly for you? If you want to obey the command of Christ to make disciples of all the nations, starting where you live, then be sure to make mention of your friends in your prayers, thanking God for them, and then letting your friends know that you thank God for them and their friendship with you and God.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we pray for our friends in Christ.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when tell our friends in Christ we are praying for them.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we let our friends know that we thank God for them and their friendship.**

Application for Today

Today I will look take time to thank God for my friends in Christ and let my friends know that I mention them constantly in my prayers. I thank God that He has blessed me with friends in Christ who love Jesus and spread that love to other people, including me. Will you let someone know today that you thank God for their friendship?

Day Three

Bearing in Mind Today

1 Thessalonians 1:3

"Constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father"

Have you ever thought about what you constantly bear in mind? At the beach, I see people constantly staring at other people. Men staring at women, parents staring at children, friends staring at friends. I also see people staring off into the wild blue yonder. What people stare at often reflects what they have running through their mind at any given time.

Did you know that what you think about people will often determine how you feel about people? Likewise, what you feel about people will also determine what you pray for people? Thinking, feeling and praying go hand in hand. All three of those things tend to influence one another.

Paul told us that he always prayed for the Thessalonians, and three things dominated his thinking while he prayed. **He constantly bore in mind the work of God in their lives.** When we pray, we should deliberately focus our minds upon the power of the Holy Spirit helping us pray (Romans 8:26, Page 1769). As Paul prayed in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 (Page 1846), he thought about three things the Thessalonians did well: (1) work of faith; (2) labor of love and (3) steadfastness of hope. Here, Paul remembered constantly their work, labor and steadfastness. Let us look at each of them in turn.

The term "work" here means business, employment, task and covers a broad range of actions. So, the "work of faith" tells us that the Thessalonians applied their faith at their job, as an employee, as a boss, as a

homemaker. Paul remembered how their faith affected every part of their lives.

Second, Paul remembered their "labor." Labor in this passage means physical exertion or toil. Paul used this same root word to describe the way he worked with his own hands as a tent-maker to pay his own way, and pay for the upkeep of his fellow workers (Acts 20:34-35, Page 1741; 2 Thessalonians 2:9, Page 1852). It took effort to love people. It will always take effort to lay down your life for other people. Paul ties the "labor" to love. I know a man who always says that you love people when you invite them to sleep on your couch. He means, however, that he wants his adult son, living at home with him, to sleep on your couch. Jesus taught that loving people starts with salvation, because only people born of God and who know God love other people (1 John 4:7, Page 1908). So, if a person does not know God, they will never love, because they have not been born of God and do not know God. The Thessalonians loved God and their love for God undergirded their toil for Christ. Paul repeatedly mentioned how he toiled for Christ by suffering hardships for the ministry, as part of His work for Christ (2 Corinthians 6:5, Page 1810; 2 Corinthians 11:23, Page 1816).

Third, Paul remembered their "steadfastness." He linked the idea of steadfastness to "work" and "labor" in 1 Corinthians 15:58 (Page 1803): "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." Only God's power helps us attain steadfastness (Colossians 1:11, Page 1841). I often see parents holding the hand of a child while small waves lap onto the beach. As they wade out, the little wave poses no challenge for the parent, but the child could easily be knocked over by the wave. The parent's steadfastness comes from maturity, size and strength. But the child holds the hand in hope. Because his parent holds his hand, he has a steadfast hope that things will be o.k. As believers, when we feel the hand of Jesus holding our hands, we should have that same hope that He will take care of us, and we can enjoy the waves of life splashing up against us. We hope in Jesus, and we long to see Him. When we place our ultimate hope in our friends, family, spouses, or others, we miss the point that only God can be our final hope.

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

So let me assemble Paul's ideas together for a moment, just as he put them together. We work and labor, and we continue to do so because of our "steadfastness of hope." Because we continue in our work and labor, we live in hope. If you want to lose your hope, then stop working and laboring for Jesus. If you want more hope, then start praying and thanking God for the work, labor and steadfastness of the believers you see around you walking with Jesus and living in His power. Focus upon what Jesus is doing in the lives of the believers around you.

In order to build strong friendships in Christ, you will need to see the work, labor and steadfastness of Christ empowering your Christian friends. You will see your friends most clearly when you bow your head, start praying, and encounter the Holy Spirit bringing to your mind what Jesus is doing in the lives of your friends in Christ.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we notice the works of faith, labors of love, and steadfastness of hope in our friends in Christ.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we mention to our friends in Christ the works of faith, labors of love, and steadfastness of hope in Christ we see in them.**

Application for Today

Today I will pray for my friends. I will be seeing their work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope, even when I have my eyes closed and I am talking with God. What will you be thinking about today when you pray? Will you share with your friends in Christ that you noticed their works of faith, labors of love, and steadfast hope in Christ? They are waiting to hear such encouraging words today.

Day Four

The Beloved Family of God Today

1 Thessalonians 1:4

“knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you”

When I lived in Orange County in southern California, I enjoyed playing basketball in a city gym. Sometimes, I would be the only white guy playing there. At other times, it would only be old white guys. Nobody seemed to care about skin color, but rather they did care if could you play basketball. Often more people would show up to play than the courts could handle. So, the gym had a list and when your name came up on the list, you could pick your team, and then play until defeated. It really mattered whom you picked to be on your team. If your team could win, then you could play on and on and on, until your team either quit or lost.

Jesus emphasized to His original twelve disciples that they did not choose Him, but rather Jesus chose each of them, and He knew that one of them would be His betrayer (John 15:16, Page 1686). Jesus knew beforehand about Judas the betrayer (John 6:70-71, Page 1667). Jesus knew that He must be betrayed into the hands of sinners to fulfill the Scriptures (Matthew 26:24, Page 1550). Jesus told His disciples that He chose them so that they would bear fruit that would remain.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:4, Paul was praying and thinking about all of his believing friends in the church at Thessalonica. He made three points in this verse we should consider carefully today.

First, Paul thanked God that God chooses people to enter His family, so that they could be called "brethren." This term includes both males and females and refers to all the believers in the church at Thessalonica. When

I played basketball in California, we played for the fun of playing a few games together. When God makes choices, He chooses you to enter His family eternally. We all become children in the family of God. Every family in heaven and on earth derives its name from God the Father.

Second, Paul thanked God that He loved His children. **God chose you to enter His family because He loved you.** God the Father sent God the Son to die for His family, so that they could live together for eternity. Right now, you can join God's family by accepting the simple gift of salvation. If you believe that Jesus died for all your sins, and you want God to forgive you, then He will. You see, we do not know whom God will choose to enter His family, but if you want to join, He will always welcome you to be on His family team. You must believe that Jesus died for you and that He has forgiven your sins because He paid the price for them by dying on the cross.

Third, God chose you. Never for a moment think that you claimed your rightful place in God's family. None of God's family members earned their place there. Before the foundations of the world, God chose me to be with Him forever (Ephesians 1:4, Page 1827). God chose sinners like me to be with Him for eternity, and so changed them by grace and faith to be new creatures in Christ, holy and beloved by God. So, even your faith is a gift of God, so that no one may boast that they did it themselves (Ephesians 2:8-9, Page 1828). But whoever wants to join God's family will always be welcome. God is not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9, Page 1827). Time, however, is short. If you die without believing Christ has forgiven your sins, because He died for you, then it will be too late.

So, let us review this verse again. God says we all live together in one church, spread across the world, as one family chosen one at a time by God. I should look around at my family, and really enjoy being with all my spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul thought of them when he prayed, and so should we.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we know that we are all brothers and sisters in the family of God. He only has one family.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we know that we are all beloved by God, no matter when or where we came into the family of God.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we know that God chose each of us individually to be adopted into His family. At the moment I was born of the Holy Spirit, God brought me into His family because He chose me before the foundations of world to be with Him forever.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we mention to our friends that God loves them, adopted them into His family, and God chose us before the foundation of the world.**

Application for Today

Today I will pray for my spiritual family and thank God for them. My friends who grew up without knowing their human family seem to appreciate most having a spiritual family. We live in Christ as an adopted family spanning thousands of years, and the whole earth. Will you be thankful that God chose you and loved you today? Will you be thankful that God chose so many other believers to be in His family? Will you encourage someone today with God's love for them, His adoption into His family, and that He chose each believer one at a time?

Day Five

The Power of the Gospel Today

1 Thessalonians 1:5

“for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”

Jesus told a parable about a sower. As the sower sowed, the seed fell on different kinds of ground. Some of the ground produced fruit, but most types of ground did not produce fruit. In that parable, Jesus explained that some people would respond to His message of good news (the Gospel), but many would not. In fact, He said that most people would enter the wide gate leading to destruction, instead of the narrow gate leading to heaven.

Paul made several critical points about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how the Thessalonians received it. Each of these points deserves our attention today. Please keep in mind that Paul was thinking about the Thessalonians when he was praying for them. He had many positive images of them flowing through his mind as he prayed.

The power of the Holy Spirit coming into our lives changes us for eternity. At the moment we receive by faith alone the free gift of eternal life from God, we become born again and will never be the same. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul first pointed out that the Gospel of Jesus Christ came to them in the power of the Holy Spirit with full conviction. What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ? The Gospel of Jesus Christ means that faith brings salvation if you believe that (1) Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scripture, and that (2) Jesus Christ was buried, and that

He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Page 1800). Paul tells us that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Therefore, we see that the Gospel brings salvation by faith alone. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Page 1855, Paul wrote further that "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." Paul also wrote: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, Page 1764). Without the bodily resurrection of Christ, we have no Gospel and we are still in our sins and we lie (1 Corinthians 15:12-19, Page 1801). But with Christ, we will be resurrected to life, but unbelievers will be resurrected to judgment (John 5:28-29, Page 1663).

Second, Paul focused our attention upon the Holy Spirit. As the third person of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), the Holy Spirit performs many wonderful, divine ministries in our lives. Remember, the Holy Spirit is God. He ministers within us to produce conviction about our salvation. As Paul said, our salvation rests not upon persuasive words of wisdom, spoken by men, but upon the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5, Page 1783). The Thessalonians received the Word of God by the power of God convicting them of the truth of the Gospel. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, we see the Gospel for what it really is, the word of God.

Third, as preachers of the Gospel, Paul and his friends acted under the power of the Holy Spirit as they brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Thessalonians. Paul said the Thessalonians knew what kind of men they proved to be among them. The Thessalonians watched these men, and could see the Holy Spirit working in them. Paul and his companions worked for the sake of the Thessalonians. They loved the Thessalonians, and labored for them.

So, as we review this verse together, we learn how to make disciples. We see that the Holy Spirit takes the Gospel of Jesus Christ and convicts the hearts of some people to receive forgiveness for sins from Jesus. The Holy Spirit also uses His divine power to help believers live Godly lives as they share the Gospel. Godly lives must always support the Godly message.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we thank God that the Gospel came into the lives of our friends in Christ with full power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we mention to our friends in Christ that we have witnessed how the Gospel came into the lives of our friends in Christ with full power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when our lives prove to our friends in Christ that we love them and labor in Christ for their sake.**

Application for Today

Today as I pray, I will think about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in my life and the lives of my friends. He supernaturally convinces me that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has come into my life with full power and conviction. I will look at my believing friends and thank God that they too have the power of God and the Holy Spirit of God at work in their lives. I see Him as you live in His love and power. Will you see the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of your friends in Christ and be thankful? Will you let your friends know what you see today?

Day Six

The Joy of the Holy Spirit Today

1 Thessalonians 1:6

“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”

Have you ever noticed the way that little children imitate their parents? Sometimes, the parents become mighty embarrassed. Paul reminded people to imitate the missionaries and the Lord Jesus, because we should follow His example (1 Corinthians 11:1, Page 1794). As believers, our lives should imitate the life our Savior. But, so often, our lives actually imitate the lives of the unsaved people around us. Therefore, we must make a conscious decision to be an example, like Jesus, for every person around us, and especially believers. But, how do we do that?

Paul recalled that the Thessalonians received the Word of God in much tribulation. This word "tribulation" means a violent time of trouble. If you go back and read Acts when Paul first visited Thessalonica, you would see that the Jews became enraged with Paul and his preaching of Jesus. They formed a mob and set the city in an uproar (Acts 17:1-9, Page 1734). Those same Jews from Thessalonica even chased after Paul when he went to Berea and preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them (Acts 17:13, Page 1734). So, I hope you can now see that the believers in Thessalonica had very strong opposition from the Jews in the city which rejected the Gospel. Even so, the believers had joy.

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

In that atmosphere of tribulation, the believers at Thessalonica had the kind of joy only the Holy Spirit can bring. You may recall that the Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in our lives, including joy (Galatians 5:22, Page 1825). In the same way, Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2, Page 1884). Sometimes when things seem the toughest, the Holy Spirit produces joy that fills our hearts and makes us feel like Jesus inside. We know His joy deep inside, even though outside things can get intensely troubling.

So, 1 Thessalonians 1:6 shows us that Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, and remembered how they became imitators of Paul and his friends, even when the persecution of believers was rising, but the Holy Spirit gave them joy inside. **As we stand together in tribulation, we feel the joy together as the Holy Spirit fills us to do God's will.** We share His joy together, and set an example by God's grace in our lives.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we set the example of Christ in our lives, so that our friends in Christ may act like Christ by following our example.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we let our friends in Christ know that they will experience tribulation, but the joy of the Holy Spirit will lift them up.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we let our friends know that we suffer tribulation together, with joy in our hearts.**

Application for Today

Today, I will focus upon my example. I will be setting one today for God or living in sin. By God's power, I want to thrive in persecution, and feel the joy of the Holy Spirit as I stand strong with my Christian friends. Will you rejoice with us today and be an example for all believers?

3

Learning To Imitate God Today

As believers, we must learn to imitate God. We imitate God when we act like God, think like God, and do all things like God. As creatures made in the image of God, we have the spiritual ability to know God and have fellowship with God. Sin separated people from God. As we learn to imitate God, we make disciples, so that they may imitate God. We watch mature disciples so that we may learn how to please God. We learn from Jesus in many ways, but in all ways we want to glorify God in our lives. We glorify God when we imitate God.

Paul praised the Thessalonians for the way they imitated God and the missionaries who visited them, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. The Thessalonians gained a reputation among many people scattered all over the region that they were strong believers. We would enjoy that kind of reputation, if it were actually true. With the Thessalonians, it was true. They truly lived for Christ and news of their great faith and love, in the midst of persecution, spread all over the area. Notice again that Paul wanted to encourage the Thessalonians by reflecting back to them the great news about their faith and faithfulness in the sharing the Gospel. The Thessalonians constantly demonstrated their love of God, their testimony for Jesus was well known throughout the region. They loved to share their faith in Christ Jesus.

Day Seven

An Example to All Believers Today

1 Thessalonians 1:7

“so that you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”

We saw yesterday that Paul and his friends set positive examples of Jesus. In turn, the Thessalonians began to imitate Jesus. Now we see that the Thessalonians had gained their own reputation as true examples of Christian living.

One time I learned about a lawyer charged with acting improperly in an adoption proceeding. The other lawyer attacked her in court, but the judge ruled that the lawyer had done nothing wrong. After leaving court, the accusing lawyer went up to the other lawyer he just attacked for about a half an hour in court and said it was nothing personal. The accused lawyer declined to shake hands, obviously because it was entirely an attack upon the person and reputation of the lawyer. Reputation makes a big difference because people get to know who you are. The Thessalonians had a great reputation, because they were full of the joy of the Holy Spirit and walked in His power. They had received the Gospel of Jesus Christ with full conviction. People really notice when you live in joy and power.

Paul used the words "so that" to begin 1 Thessalonians 1:7. One important goal of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to make disciples of the nations, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us (Matthew 28:19-20, Page 1557). **We form strong relationships in Jesus when we all become imitators of Him.** Our example influences the example of the other believers and together we become better imitators of Jesus. Our fidelity to His teaching binds us together as friends in

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

Christ. Christ forms the center of our relationship with each other. We reflect His joy and glory in our lives.

I knew of a church congregation that had one group that met inside at 11:00 a.m. and another group that meets on the lawn of the church building at 11:00 a.m. The two groups also had a lawsuit in circuit court against each other. What kind of example does that set for the whole community? Your community will get to know you, but what will they think about Jesus based upon your conduct? Paul said that the Thessalonians had a great reputation, even with geographical regions that were traditionally the enemies of each other. So, all kinds of people from all over the region had a great impression of the Thessalonians.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we encourage believers to be great examples of Jesus Christ.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we let our friends in Christ know that we see their great example, and we tell them that people have noticed their faith. In some cases, we may even be able to say that their great example of faith has spread all over the surrounding regions.**

Application for Today

Today, I am going to thank God for the believers I know who have a great reputation for following Christ. I will give serious attention to making Jesus the center of my life, and my friendships with other believers. As Jesus becomes more and more the center of my life and activities, then the Holy Spirit will produce greater joy and unity with other faithful believers in my life. I would glorify God if I had a reputation among many believers for walking with Jesus Christ. I would enjoy it even more if I were merely a part of the local assembly with same reputation of walking with Christ. Jesus loves to use His children to set examples of encouragement to many

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

other people. Whom will other people see in your life today so that may follow the example you set?

Day Eight

Sounding Forth Today

1 Thessalonians 1:8

“For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.”

Have you ever noticed that some groups really sound out their personal views. I often see on television spokesmen for one political party or another, eagerly putting forth their views. I also see special interest groups buying air time to promote a new initiative. In most cases, those groups have little to fear in retaliation. Unless, of course, you criticize an Islamic practice or Islamic leader. In that case, the liberal news media applies special rules of support and protection that they never apply to Christian organizations. In their mind, no one should sound out their views about Islamic activity if that would somehow jeopardize the safety of the news organization. Do not miss my point: I am not saying anyone should make improper attacks upon any religion. I am only observing that today that many unbelievers in America seek to impose many improper rules upon believers who seek to sound out their faith in Jesus Christ. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he knew they lived in a place of intense persecution, particularly from the Jews who violently opposed the preaching of the Gospel in Thessalonica and the neighboring areas. Always remember that Jesus was a Jew, like Paul. According to Jesus, salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22, Page 1660).

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

The Thessalonians knew about persecution, and the cost of spreading their faith. Instead of shrinking back from sounding forth the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they spoke even more boldly. Why would anyone risk so much to talk about Jesus? Let us turn to Romans 10 for a few moments.

In Romans 10:13 (Page 1722), Paul stated that whoever will call upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved from eternal punishment. He then started asking a series of questions that focus upon the importance of sending forth missionaries who will preach the Good News of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:14-15, Pages 1772-1773). Paul concluded with this famous verse: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17, Page 1773). Without a preacher, people will not hear about the salvation Jesus has already purchased and delights in giving to sinners without cost to them. The point here is that the plan of God for spreading the Gospel depends upon people sounding forth their faith, even in the midst of opposition. I also want to emphasize another passage.

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He left the disciples with very clear instructions to follow: once the Holy Spirit had filled them and empowered them, they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem first, and then move out to the rest of the world (Acts 1:8, Page 1698). They started in Jerusalem, where they lived. In the case of the Thessalonians, they sounded forth first from where they lived, Thessalonica. The whole region heard about the Thessalonians' faith in Christ. Can you imagine having a church testimony on that scale, that everyone knows about your testimony? **When believers stand together and share their testimony together as one body for Christ, the witness spreads far and wide.**

Please notice too that Paul said the testimony of the Thessalonians was so widely known, that Paul and his friends had no need to say anything. Jesus used the Thessalonians to set an example of faith and salvation to the entire region of Macedonia and Achaia (the areas around Thessalonica) and everywhere their faith was known.

Whom will you tell today about the forgiveness Jesus offers as a free gift to everyone who believes that He died to set sinners free from death

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

and judgment? Who will hear the Gospel today and believe in Jesus for eternal life? Will you sound forth today?

In order to build strong friendships in Christ, we need to sound forth the Gospel together. As a group of Christians, we should speak together of the glory of Christ forgiving sins and the Holy Spirit bringing joy into our lives. I am going to thank God for the great testimony of my fellow Christians uniting their voices to tell of the great things God has done for them.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we sound forth our faith in Jesus Christ.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we let our friends in Christ know that we know they have a reputation for sounding forth their faith in Jesus Christ.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to recognize opportunities to sound forth the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone in my community. I know God will be moving hearts of believers to let the Gospel of Jesus Christ ring forth from their lives. What will people be hearing from you today?

Day Nine

Serving God Today

1 Thessalonians 1:9

“For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.”

Friendship means that people have formed a positive relationship with each other. Jesus told His disciples that they were His friends, because all the things He had heard from His Father He had made known to them (John 15:15, Page 1687). In 1 Thessalonians, Paul has been praying for the Thessalonians, and he had many positive memories of them. He first complemented the Thessalonians on their faith and their joy in the Holy Spirit. Then he complemented their faith and testimony, which has spread everywhere. Paul then turned to their conversion.

Paul commended the Thessalonians because they turned from idols to serving a living and true God. Let me break this sentence into several parts.

First, Paul talked about the complete turn the Thessalonians have made in their lives. In order to form tight friendships and strong bonds in Christ with other believers, you must first have a strong relationship with God. Until you are willing to turn your life to God, you will only have superficial relationships with people. I have seen many wealthy fathers lose all contact with children they “love” because those kids want nothing to do with their parents. Not one of the children had faith in Christ, and neither did their parents. I often remind fathers of Deuteronomy 6:7 (Page 297). Fathers must teach their sons diligently and talk with them when you sit and when you lie down and when you rise up. The point is constant

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

instruction to fear God and love God with all your heart. In that context of loving God, people form strong bonds of divine love that keep them together for a lifetime. Those relationships start with turning your life to God.

Second, Paul mentioned that the Thessalonians turned away from idols. Popular idols today include the love of money, the love of power, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life. All the things you put in front of God constitute an idol in your life. For many people, their work defines their existence. If they have done well at work, they have a good day. If they lose their job, then they lose their entire identity. We should all be very careful about idols in our lives. We should be especially careful to turn away from our idols and leave them behind. In order to have a strong relationship God, you must first forsake your idols. Turn away from them and you will find your relationship with your spouse, your children, and your spiritual friends to be much stronger. Turn off your television more often and spend more time with brothers and sisters in Christ. Spend less over-time at work, and more time with the people around you who need to form a strong bond with you that will encourage both of you to walk with Jesus Christ.

Third, Paul talked about service. When you leave your idols behind, then you spend more time with Jesus. You will want to serve Christ with your life. Serving Christ means you no longer serve idols or demons, but rather look to live in the love of Jesus. You no longer pursue your own wants and desires, or devote yourself to idols formed by your own hands. Instead, you love Jesus and the Holy Spirit brings power and joy for living, even in tribulations.

Fourth, notice that Paul described God as living and true. Paul emphasized the qualities of God with the words “**a** living and true God.” Paul did not say “**the** living The God” because Paul sought to contrast the lifeless idols with the qualities of God as living and true. The God we serve lives within us, and remains forever true. Jesus described Himself as the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6, Page 1684). In order to have a strong relationships in Christ, we must serve the living and true God. Jesus is God and we must recognize the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as one True God. God must be the central feature of our lives, and His love must control

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

us. We will be the kind of people who have the best interests of our friends at heart.

Finally, we see that the Thessalonians received the Gospel and formed a strong friendship with Paul and the other believers who shared Christ with them. Each of us needs to develop the qualities in this passage so that we can be better friends with the people around us for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we turn to God from idols and serve the true and living God.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we let our friends in Christ know that we see that they have truly changed—they have turned to God and now serve a living and true God.**

Application for Today

Today, I will be rejoicing that I turned away from idols, and now serve a living and true God. I want to encourage every believer I see today to do the same thing. Will you turn and serve the living and true God today and encourage your friends to do likewise? Will you let your friends in Christ know today that you have seen them serving a living and true God?

Day Ten

Waiting for Jesus Today

1 Thessalonians 1:10

“and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, Who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

The Bible presents a very clear picture of Jesus coming to resurrect believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (Pages 1849-1850). God revealed to us that Jesus will come to the clouds of earth, and brings all the believers asleep in Christ with Him. At that time, He will raise from the dead the bodies of all the believers on earth. The future resurrection of believers in the New Testament refers to the transforming of the physical body into a body of glory. So, when Jesus appears, He will descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will receive their glorified, resurrected bodies first. Then those believers who are alive when He comes in the clouds will receive their glorified, resurrected bodies next. Notice that in this passage Christ never touches foot upon the earth, but resurrects the bodies believers. All believers at that instant in time will be in the clouds of earth with Jesus, and will be with Him forever. Many believers refer to the appearance of Jesus in the clouds as the Rapture. We should comfort one another with those words of the Bible.

Paul introduced Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 as the Rescuer of believers from the wrath to come. If you read the Book of Revelation, you will see a very clear picture of God's wrath poured out upon the earth over a seven year period (called the Tribulation), still future from today. Before

those days of wrath come, Jesus will come to the clouds to rescue believers from that time of intense wrath upon the earth.

Paul also emphasized that the Thessalonians were waiting for Jesus because He had been raised from the dead. **So, every believer should wait patiently, while working diligently, for the appearance of Christ to rescue the believers.** He stands as the living promise of our resurrection to be with Him forever.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we recognize that a common faith among believers that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we recognize and proclaim that the entire world sits under judgment from God for doing evil, and He will bring wrath upon the world and its inhabitants.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we encourage one another that Jesus will rescue us from the wrath to come.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we let our friends in Christ know that we are all waiting for Jesus to come to the air, and rescue believers then living on earth from the wrath of God to come.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we let our friends now that we see them waiting for the appearance of Jesus Christ, and we will be with Him, with resurrected and glorified bodies**

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when let our friends know that we see their trust that He will rescue us from the wrath to come.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage my friends to think about Jesus and His personal return to the clouds of earth. I want to share with them that Jesus lives today, and He will come again to rescue all believers from the wrath to come. Only Jesus can rescue people from the wrath to come, and we should look forward to the day when He appears in the clouds to resurrect our bodies to be with Him forever. Whom are you waiting for today?

4

Learning To Speak for God Today

As believers, we must learn to speak for God. Only God can teach us how we must speak for God. After we have spent time learning how to pray and imitate God, we will learn how to speak for God. God will give us the words to say to people, mainly through the Bible, but we will also need to be sure we do not compromise our words with our actions. People not only listen to what we say, but they also evaluate all that we do as we spend time with them.

We cannot separate what we say from whom we are in Christ. Paul taught by example. His walk with Jesus Christ was so powerful that his words matched his walk. Paul did not wither under opposition, or use the Gospel of Jesus Christ to make money. He was not a man of error, impurity, or deceit. God entrusted Paul and the ministry team to make disciples, and so they spoke. They did not seek to please men, because God examined their hearts.

Paul never sought glory from men, nor did he use flattering speech. He showed a fond affection for people, with gentleness and tender care. He not only imparted his words, but also his very life. His friends in Christ became very dear to him.

Day Eleven

Coming to You Today

1 Thessalonians 2:1

“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain”

My friend asked me to play basketball with him at a park. Just a single basket on an asphalt parking lot provided a real challenge for me. Before I went, I suspected that I could not really shoot a basketball any more. Once upon a time I could shoot, dribble, and even dunk a basketball. Let me tell you, no more. My friend had knee surgery about a year before and he still has mobility issues. We played HORSE and he won. I was sure the basket was higher than the regulation ten feet, but no matter, I could not shoot. I shot so many air balls that I had to chase the ball all over the place. You know, however, that I played ball with my friend mainly to spend time with him. We both knew that we needed exercise, but we also like friendship. We read the Bible together at the beach, often in a small group. At the park playing basketball, we just had some fun together, and maybe a little exercise. I was so tired after few minutes of hoops (read chasing the ball) that I had to get a chair and sit in the shade for a while. I did not waste any time playing a little basketball with my friend. We both had a nice time. Next, I want to return to surfing. I bought a life vest and expect I will need it.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:1, Paul continued to talk about the Thessalonian believers. Every believer you know needs to hear some positive things from you. I have many friends who tell me that their spouse, father, child, or you name it, only tells them all the things they are doing wrong. I know we have all been there and feel so strongly that all we hear are negative messages from people we love.

Paul built strong spiritual friendships wherever he went. When you read his letters to the New Testament churches, he was always greeting people by name, and talking about the things going on at Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Colossae, and Rome. In verse 2:1, Paul mentioned that the Thessalonians knew Paul did not come in vain to them. Let us look at two things here.

First, Paul reminded the Thessalonians of what they knew. **In order to build strong spiritual friendships, you will need to share common spiritual experiences.** In this case, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they knew within themselves that Paul came to them, and Paul implied that God sent Paul to them. If you have believed that Jesus forgave you from all your sins, because He died for you and lives in you today, then God sent someone to you to share the good news (Romans 10:14-18, Page 1773). Encouraging one another to look back at positive events in our lives (blessings from Jesus), including how you met your friends in Christ, often pays special blessings.

Second, Paul used the phrase "not in vain" to describe the results of Paul's coming to the Thessalonians. As Paul explained in 1 Thessalonians 1:3-10, the Thessalonians received the Gospel of Jesus Christ with joy in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction. Paul's preaching would have been in vain if the Thessalonians would not have received the Gospel by faith, or if they abandoned their profession of faith shortly after making their claim of faith (consider Matthew 13:20-21, Page 1523). Instead, Paul reminded them of their great testimony all over the region and how they are examples of faith in Christ Jesus.

If you find yourself saying too many negative things about life, and your friends, then you may want to strengthen your friendship by looking at how you came to meet your friends. How did God arrange for you to meet your friend? Were you the person who led your friend to Christ? Paul clearly had a purpose of coming to Thessalonica to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to teach the disciples to observe all that Jesus had commanded (Matthew 28:19-20, Page 1557).

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we remind our friends how God drew us together.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we remind our friends that God had a purpose for putting friends together.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we recognize that God never acts in vain in forming new friendships.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ we realize that God brings friends together for His glory.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to think about where God is sending me. Whom will I meet today that I will be reminding tomorrow about how we first met? A few days ago I shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with a woman at the beach and she prayed to receive Christ. I often give the person a Bible, and write the date and a few verses in the Bible so they can remember when they prayed and believed that Christ has forgiven their sins. Today, I hope to see someone I can remind of the way God brought us to meet each other and that God never acts in vain. Whom will you remind today?

Day Twelve

Speaking Boldly for Jesus Today

1 Thessalonians 2:2

“but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.”

Everyone reading the New Testament should take the trip to Philippi with Paul, as recorded in Acts 16:11-40 (Pages 1731-1733). Luke, the human author of Acts, introduced Philippi as the leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony on the northern Mediterranean Sea. Paul began preaching at the river, to a group of women assembled there on the Sabbath day. While preaching, he met Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God, and a listener. God opened her heart to respond with faith to the things spoken by Paul. She and her entire house were then baptized. Paul also met a slave girl, who had the evil spirit of divination within her. That slave girl followed Paul around for a while, telling people that Paul spoke for God. Paul did not want evil spirits promoting his ministry, and he also wanted to free that woman from spiritual domination by an evil spirit. So, Paul cast out the spirit and her owners lost the livelihood they made from her demonic activities. Her owners then stirred up the people of Philippi and put Paul in jail.

While Paul and Silas were in jail at Philippi, they were praying and singing hymns at midnight, with the prisoners listening to them. Paul and Silas also evangelized the prison. Suddenly, God caused a great earthquake. God opened the prison doors, and everyone's chains unfastened. The jailer

was about to kill himself for fear that the prisoners would escape. Paul and the other inmates stayed. The Philippian jailer with fear and trembling fell before Paul and Silas. The jailer said: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul replied: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. The Philippian jailer, along with his household, received salvation from Jesus Christ and were immediately baptized. The next day, the chief magistrates sent to officials to release Paul and Silas. Paul, however, would not leave the jail until the magistrates, who had beaten him and jailed him without a trial, came personally to lead him out. You see, Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, and Roman law required no beating or jail until a citizen had been tried in court first, and found guilty. So, now you have some idea about the troubles Paul and his companions had at Philippi. Paul left Philippi and went next to Thessalonica.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul talked about boldness in our God to speak the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This term "boldness" describes how Paul spoke at Damascus (Acts 9:27, Page 1717) and Ephesus (Acts 19:8, Page 1737). Undoubtedly, Paul spoke out boldly everywhere he went, but the emphasis here is that opposition did not stop him from speaking. Notice in this verse how the boldness came from God. Paul was not bold in himself, but rather was empowered by God to speak with boldness (compare 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Page 1783).

Paul did not let opposition stop him from speaking boldly for Christ. As we have already seen in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 (Page 1846), the Thessalonians had received the Gospel of Jesus Christ among much opposition. As we speak out boldly for Christ, our testimony stirs up courage in other believers to speak out the word without fear (Philippians 1:14, Page 1835). Remember too the words of Jesus: "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12, Page 1506).

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ we speak out boldly for Jesus Christ.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we encourage our friends to speak out in Christ.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we share how God has helped us endure persecution for sharing our faith.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we never let persecution stop us from sharing Christ, by the power and love of God at work in our lives.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage my friend in Christ who has been insulted or persecuted for sharing faith in Christ. I will share my experiences with being persecuted for speaking out for Jesus, and together we shall become better friends. Whom will you encourage to share Jesus with boldness today?

Day Thirteen

Exhorting without Error, Impurity or Deceit Today

1 Thessalonians 2:3

“For our exhortation does not come from error, or impurity, or by way of deceit;”

I heard a television preacher say that it costs him \$80,000.00 per day to keep his program on the air. He was asking for more money. Personally, I am not persuaded that spending that kind of money produces the best results for \$80,000.00 per day, or \$400,000.00 for one Monday through Friday week of programming, or \$20,800,000.00 per year. How much does it take for one person to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with one more person? How many people could be fed with those funds, or how many missionaries sent and supported? My real point is that each of us has a duty to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, personally and daily. Most people who profess to know Christ have never shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone, and have never prayed with anyone else to receive forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, they have heard numerous messages encouraging them to share their faith, but they adamantly refuse to do so. Why do you receive the gift of salvation freely, but refuse to share it with others? Do you not believe that everyone will go to hell for eternal punishment unless they pray and believe in the forgiveness that only Jesus provides? My "Christian" friends tell me they visit their friends in the hospital, with death near. I ask them if they shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with their sick, unbelieving friends and they look at me like I have the plague. They most often respond that they have invited the person to

come to a meeting of believers, but do not want to make the sick person uncomfortable. I guess they do not think that hell will be "uncomfortable" for an eternity. With the dismal truth that many people professing to know Christ will never share their faith, let me now focus upon Paul, who not only shared his faith, but did it as an example for all us to follow. If you do not intend to share your faith, then why bother reading about Paul? Paul consistently shared the Good News of Jesus Christ, suffered persecution, and repeatedly acted to the glory of God in his ministry.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul talked about "exhortation." This word "exhortation" comes from the root meaning to call someone to stand beside me. Depending upon the context, it means appeal, entreaty, encouragement, exhortation or comfort. In the context of 1 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul was just talking about speaking the Gospel of Jesus Christ with boldness in God, and amid much opposition. Therefore, you can see that Paul was referring to the way he came to the Thessalonians and spoke of Christ to them. Paul emphasized the way he presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Thessalonians with three separate, but related, words: "error," "impurity," and "deceit."

Error stands opposite the truth. So many people do not share the Gospel of Jesus Christ because deep in their hearts they do not believe the truth that all unbelievers have the wrath of God abiding upon them, even though they are physically alive (John 3:36, Page 1659). They do not believe that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23, Page 1766). The truth is that only Jesus is the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Jesus Christ and His Gospel. To preach anything else for salvation constitutes error.

Impurity means something that has become dirty, or unclean. When I go ocean fishing in the morning, I wade in the shore break and cast my artificial lure (my plug) beyond the small waves. Inevitably, a wave breaks and splashes me all over with sea water. The water dries, but leaves me with salt spread thinly over both me and my clothing. I feel messy, and sometimes a little itchy. Paul never preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ with any impurity. He never left anyone with a thin coat of salt after speaking of Jesus to them. Instead, when Paul exhorted people to receive Christ, and His forgiveness, the impurities began dropping out of their

lives. When I see television preachers begging for money, I wonder if they live in giant houses, fly on private jets, and have luxurious lifestyles, that have been generated from the ministry. Impurity always means that the good has been mixed with the bad. The clean has become smudged with the dirty. Paul only preached in purity.

Deceit means that you say one thing, but live another thing. Deceit means that you tell people to live one way, but actually you intend for them to help you live in another way. Deceit comes in many forms, but Paul never practiced any of them. So many people get sick and tired of all the deceit on the Christian television channels. You see men and women acting deceitfully, especially regarding finances. How many times have you seen journalists expose the misdeeds and misapplications of funds by television preachers? Paul made it a priority to call people to Christ, and only Christ.

We should learn from the television preachers that money really counts. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, however, counts far more. If you could imagine it, the Gospel of Jesus Christ can travel wider, better and faster through human lips speaking directly to human ears and hearts through the ministry of faithful believers sharing their faith personally with people they know and meet. Multi-media ministry certainly has its place in the Christian world of programming, but it will never replace personal evangelism. As you imitate the spiritual lives of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, and God, we must remain conscious that our exhortation must be without error, impurity, or by way of deceit.

Summary for Today

- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we exhort our friends in Christ by coming alongside them to speak with them.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ we exhort without error, impurity or by way deceit.**
- **We strengthen friendships in Christ when we act and exhort without error, impurity or deceit.**

- **We harm friendships in Christ when people learn that we only spoke to them for our own selfish, evil motives; so always exclude all error, impurity or deceit.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to exhort people to know Christ and grow up in Christ. I want Jesus to remove any hint of error, impurity or deceit in the way I present the Gospel of Jesus Christ and encourage believers to follow Christ. Will you share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, without error, impurity or deceit, today?

Day Fourteen

Speaking To Please God Today

1 Thessalonians 2:4

“but just as we have been approved to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.”

Have you entrusted someone to perform a very important task for you? I think about that fact all the time as a lawyer. My clients entrust to me some cases involving litigation. My clients expect that I will use my best efforts to solve the problem. In some cases, I advise my clients to pay the other side and settle the case. In other matters, I advise my clients to seek to recover their losses. In each case, I must review the law and facts and determine the best course of action. I try to act always in the best interest of my client, as a matter of trust.

Paul had a task entrusted to him far more important than practicing law. In fact, the most important task on earth had been delivered to him as a steward of God. God commissioned Paul to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. In 1 Corinthians 4:1-4, Paul explained how God entrusted the mysteries of God to Paul as a steward. Paul then said: "it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy" (1 Corinthians 4:2, Page 1785). As Paul traveled around the Mediterranean world, he demonstrated his faithfulness as a steward of God's mysteries. The people at Thessalonica could testify to Paul's faithfulness to the message.

Paul linked the message he preached, and how he preached the message, to God who examines the hearts. This term "examines" may be rendered "examining" to convey its sense that, as Paul speaks, God continuously examines every word Paul proclaims, and whether he is speaking in error, impurity, or deceit. Because God entrusted Paul with His

message, and then examined Paul as he spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul did not focus upon pleasing men. We should always keep this principle in our minds.

You can be friends with the world by pleasing the men around you. But you cannot be friends with the world and friends with God. "Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4, Page 1891). Jesus taught His disciples that the world would hate them, because they first hated Jesus (John 15:18-25, Pages 1686-1687). So, you can change your message of salvation to be friends with the world. You can drop out all the parts of God's message that the world may find offensive. For example, you could say that Jesus was not really divine, and be like other cults that deny His divinity and equality with the God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Or, you could never mention that unbelievers go to hell and suffer there for an eternity. But in both cases, you would not be a faithful servant spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but rather you would have become someone who preaches your own ideas.

Building strong friendships in Christ means that you will never speak to please men, but always speak the message of God because: (1) He entrusted you with His message; and (2) He examines your heart and words continually. Jesus loves you every day, but demands that you speak faithfully for Him. Spread His message, knowing that He will reward you for faithful service. (Hebrews 11:6, Page 1882). Make friends and disciples of Jesus who speak God's message backed up with lives that God examines and finds faithful. Together we can walk before Him by faith, living in His lovingkindness.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship in Christ form when we speak to please God and not men. We will never put our friendships with anyone before God.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship in Christ grow when we keep in mind that God examines our message and actions, all the time. He really knows why we speak and how we speak. As**

we speak together, and support others who speak for God and not men, we encourage each other to speak out boldly for Christ in His name and with His Gospel.

- **We harm bonds of friendship in Christ when we speak to please men. As friends in Christ, we must speak for Him and avoid speaking to please men. Any friendship built upon speaking to please men will only lead to failure and further problems, but speaking to please God will lead to eternal rewards from Him.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to speak for Christ, knowing God examines my message and heart continuously. I also want to encourage believers around me who speak out for Jesus Christ. When God examines you today, what will He see and hear?

Day Fifteen

No Flattery Today

1 Thessalonians 2:5

“For we never came to you with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—”

I went fishing one day and waded in the small waves casting my plug for fish. I fished my plug for about fifteen minutes, casting between the sets of waves, hoping to entice some predator to attack my artificial plug. Nothing happened. But, I enjoyed the beauty of the sunrise, walking in the water, and loving the morning. I happened to look on the beach, over my shoulder, and saw a great blue heron. With its striking long white plumes on its head, and pointed beak for spearing prey, I knew it was looking for a meal, and hoping I would bring it up on the beach for it. You see, this great blue heron knew all about surf fishermen, and knew from experience where he could find a meal. He had learned that I might just produce a meal for him that morning, and all he had to do was wait. It turned out, however, that he waited in vain for me, because I caught nothing. My plug, which looks like a fish, but is not really a fish, did not fool anything that morning.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:5, Paul talked about how he never used flattering speech to persuade the Thessalonians. Before I select a lure to entice fish, I try to watch what works at the place I am fishing. I learn from other fisherman, and from the fish in the water, what attracts predators to strike. I want them so excited by my plug, and its action in the water, that they cannot resist it. In fact, I prefer fairly calm water when I cast, so I can twitch my plug to imitate a fish in distress and persuade the predator to strike. The plug and its presentation to the fish make all the difference. You see, I am selling a fake to fish.

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

Paul never sold a fake, never faked anyone out, and never faked any part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He never preached error, impurity, or deceit. He never spoke to please men at the expense of pleasing God first and always. He never used flattering speech. Paul had been entrusted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and by God's power, the message of Jesus saved men from their sins.

Sometimes I fish with live bait I castnet in the surf. When I cast up a little fish, I put it in my bait bucket with an air pump to keep it alive. Then I use special flourocarbon leader, nearly invisible in the water, to connect my hook to my line on the fishing pole. I then hook the fish to my leader, with a small hook. I want the bait fish on my line to swim as naturally as possible. It is natural, and needs nothing from me to attract fish. I catch many fish in the daytime using live natural bait. I do not need to fool the fish, or twitch the bait. It swims by itself. I do not need to flatter the predators, or entice them in any way.

When you understand that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has the power of Jesus Christ, the living Lord, behind its message, and as the central Person of the message, then you will understand that you do not need to use flattering speech. In the New Testament, the term "flattering" only occurs here in 1 Thessalonians 2:5. In the book of Proverbs, flattery was used to describe the seductive words of the adulteress (Proverbs 2:16, Page 1004) and for the man who spreads a net for his own steps (Proverbs 29:5, Page 1042).

The great blue heron that watched me fish left without a meal from me. I had nothing to give him, and I was not about to toss my plug to him and entice him to bite it. You see, I love those big birds, and understand their need to eat. Why would I want to entice the bird to eat something fake, and only pierce himself with hooks? The hooks in a fish's rubbery lips cause no problems, but the heron would have serious problems eating an artificial lure with hooks. Flattering speech, especially when used to present the Gospel, detracts from the message and only creates the wrong impression. We never need to resort to flattery, because we actually tell people the truth about their sin, and their need for the Savior, Jesus Christ, to save them. Jesus loves sinners and loves to save sinners.

One other point about the great blue heron. It just stood there, nearly four feet tall, watching me. It waited patiently, and kept its distance. It had no pretext for greed, because we both knew why it had come to visit me. If I just stand in the surf, the heron stays away. When I fish, it comes and stands near. It wants food, without pretext. The sea gulls are the same way. They only come to me when I have something to feed them. They are very straightforward, without pretext. They come to be fed. Paul said he never offered the Gospel of Jesus Christ with a pretext for greed. He came to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that people could be saved from their sins. **Paul did not come for personal gain, for money, for fame, or any other hidden motive.** He offered spiritual food from Jesus Christ, as a free gift. God watches me fish for men, and knows my motives.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ without using any form of flattery about ourselves or the audience. Spiritual friendships in Christ are not built upon a foundation of flattery. People hear the message of salvation for sinners presented by a righteous person who still sins, but saved by grace.**
- **We strengthen our friendships in Christ and make new friends in Christ through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and by avoiding all flattery.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship in Christ grow when we remove any pretext for greed from our presentation of the Gospel. We do not need anyone's money and do not seek earthly riches in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By the power of God, the Lord Jesus Christ shines through His Gospel.**
- **We harm friendships in Christ, and undermine the power of the Gospel, when we speak flattering words or use any pretext for greed, especially in presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to avoid flattering speech and any pretext for greed in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What will your motives be today when you share the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Day Sixteen

No Glory from Men Today

1 Thessalonians 2:6

“nor did we seek glory from men, either as from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.”

Have you ever seen people seeking their own glory? They dress a certain way, they wear their hair a certain way, they talk a certain way, and they have just the right friends. If you look around today, you will see people all around you seeking their own glory. They do so many things to gain glory from men. I am not saying that taking care with clothes, hair, speech, and friendships is automatically wrong. I am saying that seeking your own glory will pose a problem. Consider your list of activities planned for today. Anything on the list that just leaps out as you as aimed at your own glory? No? Well, to see if you are actually seeking your own glory may require a little help from Paul.

Paul linked seeking glory with exercising authority. When you throw your own weight around, and draw attention to yourself, you can be sure that you are seeking your own glory. Paul said avoid doing anything that seeks your own glory. Paul continued his theme about how the ministry team came to Thessalonica, and how they exhorted them, without error impurity, or deceit, even after suffering persecution. They did not seek to please men, but only God. They never flattered men, or did anything as a pretext for greed. Paul explained the ministry team did not seek glory from the Thessalonians or from others.

Have you ever considered the authority of the apostles? Paul had obvious financial authority to seek financial aid from the Thessalonians, as he did from other churches (1 Corinthians 9:3-18, Page 1791-1792; Acts 11:27-39). Paul performed many signs and wonders and miracles at Iconium (Acts 14:1-4, Page 1727), and Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:12, Page 1817), and apparently throughout his preaching from Jerusalem round about as far as Illyricum (Romans 15:18-19, Page 1779). Even the handkerchiefs and aprons worn by Paul were carried to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out (Acts 19:11-12, Page 1737-1738). Paul directly demonstrated great power over demons (e.g., Acts 16:16-19), and even a bite from a viper had no effect upon him (Acts 28:3-6, Page 1756). In Malta, people from all over the island came to Paul and he cured them of their diseases (Acts 28:7-10, Page 1756). Paul not only spoke the revelation of Jesus Christ, but the power of the Holy Spirit confirmed the message with signs, wonders, and miracles. Yet, Paul and the ministry team did not assert their authority. They did not impose their apostolic authority, because they were not seeking their own glory.

You may have noticed the plural "apostles." In 1 Thessalonians 2:6, Paul referred to "apostles" plural. We see there that the term included both Paul and Silvanus (perhaps another name for "Silas"), and perhaps Timothy. The New Testament speaks of "apostles" as a spiritual gift (Ephesians 4:11, Pages 1830-1831), but also a special group of men who spent time with Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:11-13, Page 1817).

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we do not seek our own glory. Notice how Paul keeps using the term "we" to describe how the ministry team acted as apostles and shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When "we" act together, we build those strong bonds of friendship.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we do not exercise our authority to enhance our personal positions. We want God alone to get all the glory, because we serve at His pleasure constantly.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we seek our own glory and exercise our authority to make us look bigger. Every employer, parent, friend and spouse should be very careful about avoiding the ungodly use of power to glorify yourself, and not the Master and His mission.**

Application for Today

Today, I want will avoid seeking glory from men. I will not use any authority to build my glory, but rather always focus upon Jesus getting all the glory, because He alone deserves it. Whose glory will you seek today?

Day Seventeen

Like a Mother Today

1 Thessalonians 2:7

“but we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.”

Do you think of yourself as gentle among your friends? Well, how gentle do you see yourself? Are you as gentle as a nursing mother treats her own children? For many of us, especially many men, we have a very hard time imagining that we should treat fellow believers with the gentleness of a nursing mother. Yet, Paul set that gentleness as the standard for building strong friendships in Christ.

Paul concluded the previous section by reminding the Thessalonians of all the things the ministry team did not do in bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them. Now, Paul turns to the positive. The word "proved" here drives home a special point. In court, I often want to make a particular point to prove my case. I sometimes need to show that a particular party breached the contract at a particular time and a particular place. The best way to prove my point is often to call the opposing party as my witness and make that witness prove my point. In the same way, Paul used the Thessalonians themselves to prove His point. You can only use this tactic in court if you are sure that the opposing party will make the right admissions, when asked the right questions. So, often you take the deposition of the witness before court, ask the witness certain questions under oath, and then ask those same questions again in court. If the answer changes, then you impeach the witness with their own deposition testimony where they gave different answers before. Paul used the

Thessalonians to prove that the ministry team was, in fact, gentle among them. He knew he would never need to impeach the testimony of the Thessalonians, because he was confident they remembered his gentleness.

I am sure that you can come up with many examples of people, often Christians, being rough with you. At times, Jesus was rough with unbelievers and called them "a brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7, Page 1504), "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew 12:39, Page 1521), "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27, Page 1543), "hypocrites" (Matthew 23:25, Page 1543). Even so, Isaiah prophesied of Jesus that He would not break a bruised reed or extinguish a dimly burning wick (Isaiah 42:3, Page 1134). In the Gospels, Jesus treated many people with great compassion. Jesus did not treat new believers the same way He treated unbelievers, especially unbelieving leaders of Israel. Here is the point: in building a strong relationship with other believers, you must master the skill, under the Holy Spirit's influence, of being as tender as a nursing mother to the new believers. Not only do you feed them the pure milk of the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2, Page 1895), but you also nurse them along with hugs and affection in Christ. **Every person on the ministry team had the same reputation of gentleness in dealing with new believers at Thessalonica.**

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we treat new believers with gentleness like a nursing mother treats her own children.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we remind our friends in Christ that we were gentle with them, and they will need to be gentle with other believers.**
- **We harm bonds of friendship when we are not gentle and tender with our friends in Christ.**

Application for Today

Today, I want act with gentleness, especially toward new believers. Who needs your gentleness today? Will you treat believers like your own child today?

Day Eighteen

Imparting Your Life Today

1 Thessalonians 2:8

“Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.”

I often sit down and think about I am going to spend my today. I have to prepare a sermon, write something, do some legal work, and meet some friends at the beach for Bible Study and prayer. I know I will enjoy all of those things. Have you ever asked yourself why you are doing the things you are doing? I sat down with a friend recently and he told me that I am the only person on earth that he wants to count as a friend. He is not a believer, but he likes to talk about the Bible. I tell my friends that I am happy to be their friend, but I am not happy to be their only friend. Well, as my friend and I talked, I encouraged him to think about his relationships with people from a different perspective. All of us need multiple friends in Christ. I spend a lot of time with men over 60 years of age. I found over time that many of those men would prefer to spend time with me one on one--praying, talking and reading the Bible. I like for those men to meet in small groups, and get to know other people in Christ. Many people, especially men, do not really want to share their lives with groups, even small groups. Of course we all need time with our closest friends to share one on one, but we also need to have fellowship with groups of believers.

Think about the people you are acquainted with. Of those people, from your perspective, who needs to have a relationship with you? I am not asking you who you like, who will live up to your expectations, who has treated you fairly in the past, or any other criteria that depends upon the

other person. I am asking, from your perspective, who needs a relationship with you, without regarding what you will get out of the relationship. **Who needs you to impart your life to them?**

In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Paul talked about his affection for the Thessalonians. Because of that affection, the ministry team imparted their lives to the Thessalonians. This term "imparted" means to transfer something over, to give or to share. Now let me link up that idea with the term "affection" in the same verse. Paul stated that the ministry team had a present, ongoing affection in their hearts for the Thessalonians. This affection prompted the ministry team to share (1) the Gospel of Jesus Christ and (2) their own lives. You see, the Thessalonians had become very dear to the ministry team. As you form strong bonds of friendship, you will see this pattern of growing affection and your friends becoming very dear to you. As you impart more of your life into them, the bonds grow stronger and the emotions of affection and counting them dear rise and the relationship deepens in Christ.

So, back to where I started. What will you be doing today to impart your life in Christ to someone, along with imparting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them? You should not plan on sharing only the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You should also plan on imparting your life. Whom will you spend time with today because they have become very dear to you? So many people run from relationships because they have been burned so often in the past. Learn from Paul. Impart the life of Christ in you to them, and not just the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let Jesus form the strong bonds of affection, and promote greater love and sharing of your lives together in Christ.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we act out of affection for people with whom we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we impart our lives to believers, and they become more and more dear to us.**

We do not grow tired of them, discouraged with them, or critical of them. We grow in affection for them.

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we stop imparting our lives to our friends, and live only in the darkness of selfishness.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to impart my life in Christ to my friends in Christ. I want to grow in affection for my Christian friends. To whom will you impart your life in Christ to today?

5

Learning To Remind Today

People often remain trapped in their past and they spend most of their time glorifying their past and lamenting their past. They swing between their victories and their failures. Depending upon how they view their lives, they tend to dwell upon either their best days or their worst days. The future often does not play much of a role in their thinking. The past dominates their conversations and they tend to relive their past. Let the Holy Spirit move inside you to remember and learn about Jesus Christ, the Father and the Holy Spirit acting in your life to the glory of God. Remember the majestic, marvelous and personal love of God--past, present and future.

Paul taught the Thessalonians how to view the past correctly and so deepen friendships in Christ. Paul encouraged believers to review their past with a purpose. Paul followed the pattern of God to remind believers of His love and kindness not only in their lives, but in the lives of other generations. God loves to remind believers of all the things He has done for believers in all ages to encourage and strengthen them for their present lives and to have unshakeable hope for the future. God focuses our lives upon the past, present and future, but He seeks to be the center of our lives at all times and in all things. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to recall the activity of the Word of God in their lives, how they became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus, how they endured sufferings, how Christ suffered and died, and how enemies hindered the ministry of Christ. Wrath awaits everyone who dies opposed to Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ came to save sinners who believe from the coming wrath of God.

We will see how Paul used the past to encourage the Thessalonians to live for Christ. When we learn correctly from the past, we learn for today and set the stage for a glorious future. Our lives move through time with Christ, and Christ dominates all time. We live in Him and share our lives in Him. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. We need to see Him

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

throughout our lives and throughout history. He will lead us to love Him more.

Before you can help your friends in Christ learn from the past, you must know and practice the principles taught by Christ in the next passage. Never imagine the past does not influence you, but recognize that only Christ must control you, and never the past. The past testifies to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and the power of God exercised in love throughout all generations. As we learn and apply the examples taught by the past, so we strengthen friendships in Christ.

Day Nineteen

Not A Burden to Anyone Today

1 Thessalonians 2:9

“For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed the Gospel of God.”

I understand that nearly half of the households in America do not pay federal income taxes. Yet, most of the income tax the government collects comes from households, not businesses. As a nation, Americans have chosen to tax only half of the households. One half burdens the other half. American politicians refuse to confront this problem by reducing the federal deficit, and paying down the national debt. Social programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Welfare Programs cannot be sustained under the present tax system. Americans continue to elect people to office who have bankrupted the country. The financial burden comes in two forms: (1) too much government spending; and (2) too few people paying taxes. The people paying the taxes often resent the burden imposed by the half not paying taxes, especially by those who act illegally, or receive government benefits without citizenship or resident alien status. Government does not impose the taxes, the population of America imposes the taxes through their votes. Anytime America wanted to change the tax system, it could vote for change. Yet, half the households want to continue the present tax and spending system, because they enjoy its benefits. Make no mistake, many disabled people and other individuals unable to work require help. The voters decide how to spread that burden of support and who may qualify for such support. For believers, we have a privilege of supporting those who are unable to work. The Bible provides very clear guidelines for supporting people with true needs.

Paul knew that the way to avoid being a financial burden upon the Thessalonians was to work "night and day" to support the ministry team (1 Thessalonians 2:9). According to Paul, the ministry team at Thessalonica endured hardship. This term "hardship" includes suffering, like having sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, enduring cold and exposure (2 Corinthians 11:27, Page 1816). Paul linked this term hardship with never eating anyone's bread without paying for it (2 Thessalonians 3:8, Page 1853). The ministry team did not come to Thessalonica looking for financial support. Instead, they brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people, and supported themselves by working night and day so that they would not burden anyone.

A friend of mine told me that his girlfriend's brother had moved into the place he lives with his girlfriend and their infant girl. He made it very plain that he would not tolerate the other man's presence in the home for more than a week or so. The other man had to find work, and do it right away. People resent supporting people who have the ability to work, but do not work. Every believer understands the need to support the poor, especially those who are unable to work. If we see our brother or sister without clothing or in need of daily food, we must feed them and clothe them (James 2:16, Page 1889). Yet everyone who can work, should work at sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and do it without burdening the people who receive it.

Paul made it very plain that anyone who joined the ministry team would be expected to work. Not only would they work, but they would also be required to labor night and day and experience hardship. Paul also taught that everyone who proclaims the Gospel should get their living from the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14, Page 1792). I am sure that no one was thinking it would be easy and financially profitable to join the ministry team and reap big financial rewards. Instead, they would impart their very lives, and enjoy the spiritual rewards of friendships in Christ, building value both today and forever.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we do not place a financial burden on people with whom we share the Gospel of God.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we work night and day, and then remind people how we worked to avoid being a burden to them.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we place financial burdens on people which detract from the ministry.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to avoid being a financial burden to anyone with whom I share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I will work night and day to support myself as I spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As believers, we experience no shame in receiving support when we are unable to work. In addition, people who give their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ have a right to support from the people they lead to salvation. Even when we are unable to work, we can still share the Gospel of Jesus Christ without charge. Paul set an example that he would rather work than be a burden. Would you rather work today than be a burden to anyone without cause?

Day Twenty

Behaving Devoutly, Uprightly and Blamelessly Today

1 Thessalonians 2:10

“You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;”

Paul used the past to establish truths for living in the present. At times, Paul sounded like a lawyer in this chapter. In 1 Thessalonians 2:5, Paul called upon God as his witness. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul called upon the Thessalonians and God as his witnesses. Paul built his case by the testimony of eye witnesses. As a general rule, lawyers do not like asking questions in court that they did not ask before under oath, often long before the witness appeared in court. In many cases, the lawyer may depose a witness before court, where the witness has to answer questions under oath. The court reporter records the answers. Then, the lawyer asks those same questions again in court, and expects the same answers. If they change, and both answers were under oath, the lawyer wants to know why. He will also use the changed testimony against the witness. Lawyers often use past testimony to establish truths that decide the case.

Theoretically, in court, the case should hinge upon the facts. Those facts decide if someone has done something unlawful, or not. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul focused upon three facts: devout behavior, upright behavior, and blameless behavior. If every ministry team could call God as witness, and God would testify that the team had behaved devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly, then every ministry team would have a perfect

testimony. Well, in this context, let us examine these three descriptions of the ministry team's behavior at Thessalonica.

Paul proved that the ministry team behaved devoutly, uprightly and blamelessly. Paul used those three adverbs to describe the way the team behaved. Who cares about adverbs? You should get used to adverbs because people will always use them to describe your behavior. You will hear people say, "You acted **strangely**," or "You surfed **radically**," or "I love you **dearly**." You get the idea about adverbs describing behavior. They often end in "-ly". Well, adverbs here matter because they described the verb, "behaved."

Could you imagine that someone would actually be willing to testify that you acted **devoutly**. This word devout means acting in a manner deliberately pleasing to God, and is related to the word for "holy" in the New Testament. Holy behavior comes from God working through you and in you.

Paul then described the team's behavior with the term **uprightly**. In American criminal courts, you are not generally given a verdict of innocent, but rather not guilty. That verdict means the state failed to prove its burden that you violated a particular criminal law. You could be a murderer, but the state failed to prove the elements of the crime in court. God described this word "uprightly" as being just, correct, vindicated and acquitted. In this context, it does not only mean you were not found guilty, but actually you were declared to be correct. God knows if you committed murder, and will render a verdict consistent with your deeds. God rendered the verdict about the ministry team at Thessalonica: uprightly they behaved.

Paul finally described the team's behavior with the word **blamelessly**. No one at Thessalonica, nor God the perfect judge, could lay any claim against the ministry team. They deserved no blame for anything they did at Thessalonica.

So, let us put these truths together. If your only goal is to win the case, you should never call a witness to the stand when that testimony will blow your case to little pieces. Never expect that God will tell anything but the truth, and the whole truth about what happened. In this case, Paul confidently asserted that both the Thessalonians and God will fully back his claim that the ministry team was blessed by God to act devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly. It took supernatural power in the lives of the ministry team to live before the Thessalonians without any problems. If we aspire to live in ministry like the ministry team sent to Thessalonica, then we will need God's total power at work in our lives. We not only work night and day, but we also spend our time acting in complete fidelity to God's ministry plan. Our behavior really counts, not just the message we preach with our lips. We must always be ready to call our friends and God as witnesses to how we behaved devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we act devoutly, uprightly and blamelessly, and do so both individually and as a team.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage each other to behave devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly for the sake of our love for Jesus, and His commission to spread His message and love to all people.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fail to act devoutly, uprightly and blamelessly. We harm ourselves, and our relationships with other believers.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to live devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly today. I know God will be witness, and I have faith He will help me achieve His

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

goals for my life today. What testimony will God render about your behavior today?

Day Twenty One

Like a Father Today

1 Thessalonians 2:11

“just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,”

Every child raised by a father can certainly tell a lot of stories about their fathers. In Jewish households, God commanded fathers to teach their sons the commandments of God and talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:4, Page 297). But, sadly, not all children knew their father, or had a father who obediently commanded his children and his household to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring blessings upon the family (Genesis 18:19, Page 25). For the fatherless, Paul acts as a spiritual father in Christ to each one of them.

I meet grandparents all the time who are so happy that their adult children have moved out of the house. Now they can enjoy their grandchildren at their leisure. Yet, the spiritual bonds between Christians should eclipse the bonds of flesh and blood. Remember that Jesus said: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26, Page 1630). Jesus emphasized there that we must follow Him and refuse to let anyone, even our families, lead us away from Himself. In fact, Jesus taught that "whoever does the will of My Father who is heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:49-50, Page 1522).

Therefore, when Paul called himself a spiritual father, he certainly continued to employ the family members as examples. Please recall that in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, he said the ministry team was as gentle as a nursing mother caring for her own children. Now, in 1 Thessalonians 2:11, he likens the ministry team to a father caring for his own children. Probably no one ever had a human parent as spiritually wonderful as the ministry team, except for the presence of God Himself in our lives. At any rate, no matter how great your parents were to you, and how much you loved them, Paul still invoked the images of mother and father to describe how the ministry team acted in Thessalonica. If you never knew your mother or father, then learn from Jesus in the Bible how to be the best parent possible, because He always sets the ultimate example.

Paul described the actions of the ministry team using three **participles**. Again, you should care about participles because people will use them to describe your actions: "When you dropped into the wave, you were **crouching** down;" "When you were **walking** home, I saw you;" "Wow, I heard you **singing**, and thought it was a dog in trouble." See those **-ing words**. They are participles that relate to the main action of the sentence. Paul used three participles to describe the fatherly actions of the ministry team.

First, Paul described them as "exhorting." This word means to call along side, so that the two of you will be close together. It can also mean that you exhort the other person, or encourage them. Of course, in dealing with children, it can mean all of the above, at the same time. My father loved me, and exhorted me to action. He told me to do whatever I did with all my heart. In this case, Paul emphasized the ongoing process of exhortation. He did it on a continuing basis.

Second, Paul used the term "encouraging." In using this word, Paul meant that, as a father, he told each one of the Thessalonian believers to keep up the good work, to continue to use their spiritual gifts, to do some more good. The word can also mean to comfort, and the idea here is that the father would promote desired activity in the child's life.

Third, Paul used the word "imploring." You implore someone when you urge them strongly. For example, "Give me your hand, and I will pull you up to safety." Paul used the term in matters of great importance. In essence, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that, as a father, he was imploring them.

With all these words, Paul focused upon the continuous action the ministry team took with the Thessalonians, and with each individual. **We must be careful to keep doing the fatherly things with each other, especially with young believers that really need a spiritual father looking after them, by exhorting, encouraging, and imploring them.** We show love for Jesus when we love our friends like the ministry team loved the Thessalonians.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when act like a spiritual father, caring for each one, exhorting, encouraging, and imploring them to follow Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we take time to act like a father of love, strength, and commitment to Christ in the way we treat younger believers as beloved children.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we no longer: (1) call other believers to stand beside us; or (2) encourage them by telling them something to promote further Godly behavior in them; or (3) implore them to act for Jesus. Never give up on your spiritual friends, no matter what they do.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to act like a loving father to my spiritual friends, exhorting them, encouraging them, and imploring them. Are you ready to act like a father today? Do you know anyone who needs you to act like a father today?

Day Twenty Two

Walk Worthy Today

1 Thessalonians 2:12

“so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

At the University of South Florida, I was not a serious student at first, but I did work at dunking a basketball after classes. In fact, I worked on my basketball skills almost every day, because I could no longer surf. When I was growing up, I surfed almost every day, unless the waves were too big for me or too small to push me. At home, I surfed and surfed, and then, at college, I played basketball all the time. In each sport, I often had specific things I wanted to accomplish. I wanted to get better and better at the sport I played, although I was not particularly competitive. I liked to have a good time, and I did not thrive on winning. Later, I developed academic goals and became a more serious student, but I always made time to play basketball, because I could not surf every day. Now, I am old and heavy, and I do not make time to surf. My priorities have changed, and I am more interested in people than sports.

Paul knew about pursuing goals, and his goals concerned the spiritual growth and development of people. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12, Paul began with the words "so that." He drew a conclusion about all the different things that the ministry team was doing at Thessalonica. The ministry team had been acting with total dedication to one goal: doing what Jesus wanted. Paul was telling the Thessalonians that all the ministry team did, it did with the singular purpose of helping the Thessalonians conduct their lives in a manner worthy of God.

Paul set the highest standard of conduct by directing their attention to God. Jesus gave His life so that we would give our lives to Him, and live in His love and power. To walk worthy of God means that our lives conform to His standards and purposes, not our own.

Paul also mentioned the kingdom of God. He stated that God calls us into His kingdom. God does the calling, and we enjoy the reign of Christ in our lives right now. We do not see the whole world subjected to the reign of Christ right now, but we submit ourselves to His reign right now. We long for the day when He will appear, and later establish His kingdom on earth, reigning from Jerusalem after He vanquishes His enemies. Until then, we walk worthy of the one and only God who calls us into His kingdom and glory. What a marvelous future! What a wonderful goal for life today!

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we walk worthy of God.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage believers to walk worthy of God, who calls us into His own kingdom and glory.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do walk worthy of God and do not care that God called us into His own kingdom and glory.**

Application for Today

Today, I will remember why we live as teammates. We strive to live worth and labor worthy of the God who calls us into His kingdom and glory. What are you living and laboring for today?

6

Learning To Endure Suffering

Every young believer must be taught many things about suffering for Jesus Christ. If you do not instruct them about suffering, it will surely come upon them and may take them by surprise. Part of making disciples includes teaching disciples all that Jesus commanded. Jesus had many things to teach about suffering, and Paul taught the Thessalonians all about suffering.

When Paul visited Thessalonica for the first time, he reasoned with Jews in the synagogue from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead (Acts 17:3, Page 1733). Paul proclaimed that Jesus as the Christ. Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a number of the God-fearing Greeks and some leading women. The Jews became jealous, formed a mob, and set the entire city in an uproar. Paul left town in the midst of growing persecution. Those same Jews from Thessalonica pursued Paul even after he left Thessalonica.

The Thessalonians had firsthand experience with afflictions, but they also had the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6, Page 1846). They became examples of suffering and holiness to the surrounding region. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to endure suffering, even as they had endured it from the beginning of their life in Christ Jesus. We can learn many things from Paul as he taught the Thessalonians concerning suffering for Christ and never giving up or backing down.

Day Twenty Three

The Word of God Today

1 Thessalonians 2:13

“For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

Many years ago I was talking with a friend of mine about spirit things. He mentioned to me that he had prayed to receive Christ with a family friend, but had never done anything more about it for years. The family friend that told him about Christ never spent time imparting his life to my friend, so that my friend would grow up in Christ. I started spending time with my friend, and he developed an intense interest in reading the Bible and praying. Tremendous joy came into his life. For several months, we spent a lot of time together, but then he got a new job and moved away. Since then, we have lost touch with each other. I often wonder how he is doing.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul started with the words "For this reason." Paul used those words to link his prayer life to the way the Thessalonians acted after the ministry team preached to them. Let me state that as a general principle. **If you are serious about the ministry Christ has entrusted to you, then you need to focus your life upon believers who receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the word of God, with real faith and commitment on their part and yours.**

As you go through life sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, some people will hear the message and not really give it a second thought. They may pray a prayer, but they lack saving faith in their hearts. They have received the word of God by hearing it, but they have treated it as the word of men. Faith is a gift of God, and not from the will of man (Ephesians 2:8-9, Page 1828; John 1:18, Page 1654). You will also see other people wonderfully receive the Word of God, and they will become new creatures right before you.

Let us focus for a minute upon the contrast that Paul drew in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 between the "word of men" and the "word of God." People can be persuaded by persuasive human arguments, or clever speech. Paul determined he would never spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ using purely human powers of persuasion (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Page 1783). Are you living your life today as if you received the "word of men" or the "word of God?"

Paul also emphasized the role of revelation here. God revealed His purposes and plans for mankind through His messengers, the apostles and prophets, and more directly through the ministry of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. When Paul talked about the Word of God, he echoed the words of the disciples when they said: "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68, Page 1667).

Jesus did not commission His servants to go and spread the "word of men," but rather the "word of God" (Matthew 28:18-19, Page 1557). Revelation here means that God has told us something we would not have known, except that God told us. The content of the revelation, in this case, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the "word of God." Finally, Paul also talked about the way the Thessalonians "accepted" the word of God. This word "accepted" means to receive or welcome. Paul said the Corinthians accepted the Gospel, and so also the Gentiles received the Gospel. I love the picture of Simeon taking the baby Jesus in his arms, and holding Him, with the full knowledge from God that he was holding the Messiah of Israel (Luke 2:28, Page 1598). Simeon "accepted" the Lord Jesus into his arms,

and knew whom he held. He was not holding just another baby, but the Savior of mankind. We should all act like Simeon.

Today, too many people place too little value upon the Word of God. Paul talked about the word of God performing its work in the Thessalonians. When the word of God enters your life, with real faith that it came from God, and God has saved you and taken up residence in your life to stay forever, then you will begin to see the Word of God performing His work in your life. The Word of God comes into your life to change you into the image of Christ. God said that He created good works beforehand that we should walk in them. Our lives not only were saved by the Word of God, but also the Word of God continues to perform its work in us for a lifetime.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we accept the word of God, as it really is, into our lives.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we use our lives to minister to people who receive the word of God. We should remember them constantly in our prayer lives, and impart our entire lives to them.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we treat the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the word of men, and neglect using our lives in prayer and service to the people who accept the Gospel as the word of God.**

Application for Today

Today, I will thank God for the people I know who have received the Gospel of Jesus Christ for what it really is, the word of God. I want to encourage them, and spend time with them today. How did you receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ? What will you do to encourage true believers with the Word of God today?

Day Twenty Four

Enduring the Same Suffering Today

1 Thessalonians 2:14

“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.”

Imitating suffering may seem like a really dumb thing to do. Yet, Paul described the Thessalonians as a church that imitated the suffering of the churches in Judea (Israel). You may recall that the people of Israel crucified their Messiah, Jesus Christ. He was a Jew, perfect under the law in every respect. Even Pilate found no guilt in Jesus under Roman law (John 19:6, Page 1693). Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they were imitators of Christ and the ministry team, having received the word in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6, Page 1846).

Often people like to trace their ethnic background. In fact, one friend of mine commissioned a DNA study so she could learn about her genetic ancestors. My wife, who holds a Ph.D. in biochemistry and molecular biology, studied genetics. She let me know that tracing back your DNA often results in big pools of genes, indicating that you have a large group of ancestors, rather than being able to identify particular individuals. You can see your genetic relationships by group and geographical area, but you probably will not find your exact ancestor going back thousands of years. Even so, people will pay large sums of money to learn about their ethnic identity, and their ancestors in general.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:14, Page 1846, Paul declared that faith in Jesus Christ breaks through ethnic, religious, social and familial boundaries. Jesus Himself let a "sinful" woman anoint Him with perfume (Luke 7:46, Page 1611), talked with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7ff., Pages 1659-1661), pointed out the faith of the unclean woman who touched his cloak (Luke 8:43-48, Page 1614), and proclaimed that He came to bring a sword, not peace, to the earth (Matthew 10:34, Page 1517). Jesus also declared that He "came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household" (Matthew 10:35-36, Page 1517).

As Christians, we must keep in mind that "religious" people, like the Jewish authorities of His day, will be violently opposed to us, just as they hated Christ (John 15:18-27, Pages 1686-1687). Furthermore, not only will they hate us, they will afflict us and try to stop us from speaking for Christ. In the sense that the Jews tried to stop Jesus from spreading His Gospel, so also Jews at Thessalonica afflicted the Christians. Yet, Christ calls a remnant of Jews even today to faith in Christ, because we know that Paul himself was a Jew (Philippians 3:4-6, Page 1838). One day, the promises to Abraham, the patriarch of the Jews, will be fulfilled with Christ reigning from Jerusalem and Israel inhabiting their promised land (Micah 4:7, Page 1456). Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the suffering they experienced from their own countrymen at Thessalonica was not new or unusual. In fact, this same pattern of persecution by friends, family, religious groups, etc. was also around since God sent the prophets to speak for Him in the Old Testament (Matthew 5:12, Page 1506). The Thessalonians had become imitators of the believers who had suffered before them, and friends remind friends of how others have shared in similar suffering. You never suffer without Christ, or without His care and concern.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we know that we are imitating the suffering of others who have come before us in Christ.**

- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we share with each other that we do not suffer alone, and our suffering for Christ is not unusual or unspiritual.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we ignore the suffering of our friends, and fail to remind them that suffering also unites us in Christ Jesus and that we imitate those who have suffered before us.**

Application for Today

Today, I will remind my suffering friends that our suffering makes us imitators of Christ and of His church. We can always count upon opposition to Christ and His message of love, but we never suffer for His sake alone. Today, will you remind your suffering friends that they are imitating the suffering of the churches and Christ Himself?

Day Twenty Five

Hostile to All Men Today

1 Thessalonians 2:15

“who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,”

Jesus was born of a Jewish mother, descended from Jewish forefathers according to the flesh, and fulfilled every element of the Jewish law. Jesus was the best Jew who ever lived. Yet the Jews crucified Him, because they hated Him without a cause. Jesus predicted that the world would hate Christians, just as the world hated Him, and just as the Jews killed the prophets who came before him (Matthew 5:11-12, Page 1506). Peter preached to the Jews in Jerusalem that they killed the Holy and Righteous One, putting to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead (Acts 3:14-16, Page 1704). Paul firmly understood that God loved Jews and would fulfill the promises and covenants He made with the Jews, but God also loved the Gentiles. When Paul and the ministry team first visited Thessalonica, many Jews there fiercely attacked the team and drove them out of the city (Acts 17:1-15, Pages 1733-1734).

Paul reminded the Thessalonians about the suffering they endured from the hands of their own Jewish countrymen, just as the churches of Judea suffered attacks from the Jews there. You may recall that Paul was the leader of attacks against Christians, until Jesus changed his life on the Damascus road and commissioned him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, after the Jews rejected the Gospel (Acts 9:1-9, Page 1716). Sometimes, you must remember that the Gospel has powerful enemies, and some enemies arise from quarters where you would not necessarily expect attack.

Remembering a common spiritual enemy strengthens your faith. Paul reminded the Philippians that they should not be alarmed by opponents, because their very opposition to the Gospel is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for believers, and that too, from God (Philippians 1:28, Page 1836). As we suffer for the sake of the Gospel, we know spiritual enemies will always oppose the work of God. We should not be taken by surprise, or alarmed. Instead, we should remember that their opposition serves as a sign of our salvation, and the fact that God has chosen us to share in the same suffering that Jesus faced.

Paul described the attackers at Thessalonica as hostile to all men. They were not pleasing to men, but angry. Ponder for a moment the spiritual opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We live among spiritual forces that hate the Gospel of Jesus Christ and devise schemes to be sure that no one spreads the message of love, redemption in Christ, and eternal peace with God. Instead, the hostile men hate and seek to kill Christians. They demonstrate their hostility to all men by preventing, as possible, the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world. As we face such opposition, we have the joy of the Holy Spirit and our spiritual friends in Christ reminding us that hostile men from all ages, from Cain forward, opposed the work of God. As we remember with our friends, our faith in the sustaining power of God grows in our lives.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we expect and face spiritual opposition to the preaching of the Gospel and the ministry of His Word.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we stand together against spiritual attacks, and remember that other believers all over the world share in that suffering. We do not suffer alone.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do not remember that many of our spiritual friends around the world, and at home, suffer for their faith.**

Application for Today

Today, I will pray for my spiritual friends that suffer for the sake of Christ and His Gospel. I will remind my friends that we face strong spiritual opposition, and we should not be alarmed. Instead, we should expect it, and see it as a sign of our salvation. What will you remember today?

Day Twenty Six

Wrath Has Come upon Them Today

1 Thessalonians 2:16

“hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to utmost.”

Evil men have always opposed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes, that opposition comes from religious leaders, even supposedly Christian religious leaders, who do not want anyone contradicting their heretical teaching. They would prefer for men to live in spiritual darkness, rather than live in the glorious light of forgiveness of sins by faith in Jesus Christ. We can always identify the spiritual enemies of Jesus by simple tests presented in Scripture. One test concerns the truthfulness of God in the Bible: do they believe that the Bible is true and that we must follow the teachings of the Bible? Many religious people deny some or all the teachings of the Bible, especially when it claims that God breathed every word of the Bible, so that we may rely upon everything it says as absolute truth. Another test concerns the deity of Christ: do they believe that Jesus Christ is God like the Father is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and always has been and always will be. Hostile men also oppose the Good News changing your life so that you rejoice even in suffering.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:16, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that their own countrymen opposed the preaching of the Gospel to them. As Jews, living in Thessalonica, they also tried to stop the ministry team from going to the Gentiles, after the Jews refused the Gospel. Paul reminded the

Thessalonians and us today that sinful men hate Jesus, and killed Him, and will do everything they can to hinder the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul and the Jews knew that the Gospel was the power of God for salvation, but the wicked Jews at Thessalonica rejected the message of Jesus. Remember, however, that Paul was a Jew, and some Jews would receive the Gospel and be saved. In fact, thousands of Jews received Jesus by faith for the forgiveness of sins under Peter's preaching at Pentecost (for example, Acts 4:4, Page 1705). God has always had a special program for the Jews, for salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22, Page 1660).

Jesus taught the wrath of God abides upon every man who does not obey the Son of God, Jesus Christ (John 3:36, Page 1659). Paul pointed out that every person hindering the message of salvation fills up the measure of their sins. God measures sins. He knows the bad acts of each man, and will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, Jesus Christ the righteous (Acts 17:31, Page 1735). When we see people hindering our work of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we should always recall the words of Paul to the Thessalonians, and know that God sees our opponents filling up the measure of their sins. But God is not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance, by receiving the gift of eternal life from Jesus, by faith alone (2 Peter 3:9, Page 1903). Sometimes, God turns a deeply hostile man persecuting the family of God into a strong messenger of God. Saul of Tarsus deeply opposed Christ, but Jesus saved Saul and he became Paul the Apostle, writing this letter about fierce persecution of Christians from the Jews. We do well to remember how the wrath of God works, and God is not willing for any to perish. He wants even the most hostile to turn to Him for salvation. We must remember how God loves the world, and hates disobedient sinners, before they are saved. Yet God demonstrated His own love toward us while we were yet sinners, by Christ dying for us.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we know that opponents will always try to stop us from sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are in Christ today because**

Christ overcame the opposition and sent someone to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with each one of us.

- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we recognize that the opponents of the Gospel of Jesus Christ fill up the measure of their sins, and the wrath of God abides upon them. Yet, God loves them too, because Paul himself was a chief opponent of the Gospel of Jesus Christ before Jesus turned him to salvation.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do not expect to encounter opposition, or fail to recognize that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33, Page 1689).**

Application for Today

Today, I will see people opposing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I will remind my friends that those opponents are filling up the measure of their sins, and wrath has come upon them to the utmost. Together, we will stand and proclaim Christ, knowing Christ has overcome all opposition. As you encounter opposition to the Gospel today, what will you remember?

Day Twenty Seven

Eager To See Your Face Today

1 Thessalonians 2:17

“But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.”

Believers share a spiritual bond in Christ that miles cannot separate. Paul brought this bond in spirit before the Thessalonians and reminded them of how he has been separated from them physically, but not spiritually. Strong friendships endure distances, but they also promote a desire to see each other face to face.

I often meet people who have no interest in being friends with anyone. One my friends explained to me recently that he just holds everyone in contempt. He relayed to me that after just a few minutes, he understands a person, and invariably sees their problems and weaknesses, and then dismisses them. He has no interest in being friends with anyone, and barely tolerates people. You probably know someone too, who, for whatever reason, would prefer not to have friends. So many times, having friends also means having heartache. For many reasons, people often decide that friends, especially Christian friends, are just not worth the effort. Of course, if you have been reading 1 Thessalonians, you know that the ministry team never felt that way. In fact, just the opposite was true.

For all my friends who tell me that friends are not worth having, I ask them if Jesus feels that way about them? Do you count Jesus your friend? Is Jesus your friend because you have no troubles or weaknesses? He sees you in perfect clarity, down to the thoughts in your mind. He still wants to be friends with you, and He loves you every day.

One day my wife told me that she heard me praying in the shower. I was stunned with surprise. She told me that she could usually hear me quite clearly as I prayed, even in her bedroom. She said maybe it was a resonance from the shower, but she could hear me even when I prayed in a normal voice. I thought my shower was a quiet place to pray out loud. Well, when she told me that news, I asked her for forgiveness if I had prayed things that may have upset her. She said no, she had heard nothing like that. When I found out she had heard many of my prayers, even my deepest thoughts expressed to God out loud, I was concerned when I knew she had heard them. I think we all pray at times frankly with God. When I pray in the shower, I am usually showering before going to work. I pray about my day, and all the things I think need doing. I always expect Jesus to guide me each day, but I express my cares and concerns from the solitude of my shower, or my supposed solitude. Sharing our lives, our thoughts, and our prayers can have good points and bad points.

When we start to make real friends in Christ, sometimes distance separates us. At the beach, I often meet people visiting from up north, or just in for a vacation at the beach. Other people I meet live in the area, and we form strong friendships. Even then, some of them move away. Many times, even spiritual friends lose contact, but when you really love people you have led to faith in Christ, you really want to know they are prospering in Christ. My wife and I never had children, but I really enjoy knowing the people Jesus has saved through my words speaking His message. I rejoice in that fact almost every day, and really miss some of my friends. Spiritually, we are united. With e-mail, video, and many other electronic tools, we can all stay in touch. **Paul made it a habit to stay in touch with the Thessalonians, and let them know just how much he cared for them, even when he could not be physically present.** He loved them and missed them dearly. We should all have and be friends like that. We must be eager to see the faces of people we love, even though we have not seen them for a time.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we realize God has united us spiritually with our friends in Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we let our friends know how much we miss them and want to see them face to face.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we lose interest in friends, and no longer want to see our friends in Christ. Our love grows cold, but Christ can use our friends to kindle afresh His love in us.**

Application for Today

Today, I will let my friends know that I miss them. For some of my friends, I need to see them again, face to face when possible. For others, I need to remind them that we are spiritually united, although physically separated. Whom do you long to see and need to contact today?

Day Twenty Eight

Satan Hindered Us Today

1 Thessalonians 2:18

“For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.”

I met a man who told me that he had made a deal with the devil, and slept with his wife. He loved to drink heavily, and planned on going down in a blaze of glory. He seemed proud of his evil behavior, and saw no reason to repent of his sins. He also did not take seriously the power of the devil. But Paul understood the power of satan and how satan moves to hinder the plans of God.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:18, Paul talked about his plans, in Christ, to come to the Thessalonians to visit them. More than once, Paul wanted to come. While many Christians understand intellectually that satan exists, and takes action today, they fail to appreciate just how active he is to work against God's plans. Before we examine more closely the hindering work of satan in Paul's life and ours, let us review three key points about satan.

First, satan has limited power over the believer. In James 4:7 (Page 1891), satan, also called the devil, can be resisted by the believer submitting to God. As the believer submits to God, and resists the devil, the devil will flee from the believer. Therefore, we understand that God's power in our lives allows us to resist the devil and overcome his evil plans for us. We do not need to fear the devil, and in fact, God commands us to fear only God (Matthew 10:28, Page 1517). By putting on the full armor of God, we stand firm against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:10, Page 1834).

Second, satan loves to accuse the believer before God. In Job 1:6-12 (Page 803), satan stands before God and tells God that Job would fold under pressure. God tells satan that satan can attack Job through his circumstances, but not by hurting Job's body. Job did not give up, but remained faithful to God. Later, God allowed satan to increase his attacks upon Job, but Job remained faithful. In Revelation 12:10 (Page 1928), satan is described as the creature that accuses Christians before God day and night. But, Jesus Christ the Righteous, stands as the Christian's Advocate with the Father, and wins every case (1 John 2:1, Page 1904).

Third, Jesus has already bound satan, and restrained his power, so that Jesus and His disciples can plunder the domain of satan's darkness upon earth. Jesus explained that He cast out demons by the power of God, and so He first had to bind the strong man (satan), before plundering the strong man's house (Matthew 12:22-29, Pages 1520-1521). After Jesus sent out His disciples to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom and to cast out demons, they reported that "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." Jesus replied that He saw satan fall from heaven like lightning. Jesus meant that satan and his power were no match for the power of Jesus Christ. The demons recognized Jesus and knew about His great power over them (Luke 4:31-37, Page 1603). He had the power to destroy them.

Therefore, with those points about satan in mind, we know that Paul would face opposition by satan, but ultimately satan cannot frustrate the plans of God. **God allows satan to test believers, to accuse believers, and to hinder believers, but God will always be in full control of all events.**

Paul used the term "hinder" which carries the idea of cutting a road, or to make a road impassable. In Galatians 5:7 (Page 1825), Paul asked the Galatians who had hindered them from obeying the truth. So, satan hinders people from fulfilling God's plans, but God allows those hindrances for His own ultimate glory. Paul knew that some actions of satan had delayed his visit to the Thessalonians. Those actions could be Paul's health, the opposition of Judaizers attacking saints who needed strengthening (as

in Galatians), or some other work of opposition to the plans of Paul. Notice that the whole ministry team wanted to see the Thessalonians.

Paul may never have made it back to Thessalonica, as far as we know, but that was not his point. Paul told the Thessalonians why he had not yet come to see them. He really wanted to come, but the schemes of the devil were hindering him. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know his heart and intentions were motivated by love for them. We must be careful to share our hearts with our friends in Christ and let them know if satan hinders us from seeing them.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we stand together against satan and submit ourselves to God.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we understand that satan intends to accuse us, hinder us, and divide us because we live for Christ, according to His plans. Take the time to tell other Christians about your desires to see them, and let them know if satan hinders you.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we ignore satan, and allow him to separate us from God's plan and people. Ultimately, God always triumphs.**

Application for Today

Today, I will draw near to God and He will draw near to me. I will resist the devil, knowing that he will flee from me. I will not allow satan to hinder me from encouraging other Christians to stand firm against the devil, and walk in the power of God. Will you contact believers today who need to hear from you, no matter how much satan may try to hinder you from such contact?

7

Learning To Bless Your Friends Today

Believers require constant spiritual encouragement, just as humans require food. As believers, we have eaten the flesh of Jesus Christ and drank His blood (John 6:52-58, Page 1667), and so we have eternal life in Christ. Even so, we all need people to lift us up in Christ Jesus.

Part of encouraging believers means that you say things to them to lift them up. Paul lifted up the Thessalonians, without using flattery or seeking glory from men. In fact Paul taught against such words as we have seen above. As we read through 1 Thessalonians, we see the heart of Paul the Apostle speaking to his beloved children, lifting them up, praising them, and calling upon them to excel still more in Christ Jesus.

Paul also had a special way of blessing the Thessalonians. He described them with lofty words, and reminded them of the future. He called to their minds who they were in Christ, and what they meant to him. He then linked who they were to the future they had with Jesus Christ. So we will see how Paul greatly encouraged people and strengthened friendships in Christ by blessing believers.

We all need to hear the blessings of God in our lives. Sometimes, God sends special believers into our lives to instruct us in how to live and please God. Those special believers bless us in many ways. Jesus blessed His disciples and we should likewise bless people in the name of Jesus. Paul called the Thessalonians his hope, joy, crown of exultation, and glory. We can learn how to bless believers by following the example of Paul.

Day Twenty Nine

Hope, Joy, Crown of Exultation Today

1 Thessalonians 2:19

“For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?”

One day my friend came up to me and apologized for being mean to me. He had apologized every day for something he had done previously, for the last three days. He said his other friends had told him he had been too hard on me. I told him that I did not even notice that he was mean to me. Indeed, I assured him our friendship remained strong. You see, my friend has not yet found the forgiveness that only Christ provides. Therefore, I expect my friend to act like an unbeliever every time I see him. In contrast, I expect very different behavior from my believing friends. I also see my believing friends in a very different way.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19, Paul paid the Thessalonians another major compliment, straight from his heart. Paul was not flattering the Thessalonians, but rather truly expressing his hope, joy and exultation (total joy).

Paul had formed bonds of friendship so strong that the Thessalonians had become his hope. Hope always looks to the future, and Paul had a particular future in mind. Paul expected that Jesus would come again to the clouds of earth in bodily form, and extract believers from the world. At that time when all believers will be gathered to Christ, Paul hoped in the Thessalonians. They were believers, and they would stand next to Paul in the glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Paul also called the Thessalonians his joy. Do you have someone in your life that you would call your joy? Paul let the Thessalonians know they were his joy. We must be willing to let people know they are our joy. So many people, even believers, never think that anyone cares for them. Paul not only felt joy for the Thessalonians, but he also let them know how he felt about them.

Paul also referred to the Thessalonians as His crown of exultation. Exultation means tremendous joy. Paul told the Thessalonians that they were his crown of great joy. Although the Thessalonians sinned, Paul saw them as saints. He could see them in the future, and he thought of them as a crown of exultation. We need to see our believing friends as crowns of exultation. When Jesus appears, I imagine that Paul would see the crown of exultation glowing with glory.

How do you think about your friends in Christ? Do you have anyone that you could say to them: "You know, you are my hope, joy and crown of exultation at the appearing of Christ"? If so, why not tell them how you feel about them. If not, why not start making such friends in Christ right now. How we think about our friends makes a big difference in how we treat our friends in Christ. You see, I expect things from my Christian friends that I never expect from unbelievers. **Only my Christian friends will truly be my hope, joy and crown of exultation.**

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we view our Christian friends as people we will stand with when Christ comes again.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we see our Christian friends as our hope, joy and crown of exultation when Christ appears. They also grow when we tell our friends in Christ how we truly feel about them.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we never think positive thoughts about our friends in Christ, and never see them in relation to Christ appearing to take us all home to be with Him forever. Silence about our friends is not always golden.**

Application for Today

Today, I will let my friends in Christ know that I see them as my joy, hope and crown of exultation at the appearing of Christ. What will you let your friends know today?

Day Thirty

The Friendship Blessing Today

1 Thessalonians 2:20

“for you are our glory and joy.”

I watched my friend cast a lure toward a large, dark school of bait fish swimming about 50 yards off the beach. Every now and then, a large silver tarpon, weighing about one hundred pounds, would rip through the surface, with bait showering all around him. In the center of the dark cloud of bait, a bright green patch of water appeared, because all the bait got out of the way of that big, hungry tarpon. Although my friend cast for about half an hour, he never hooked a single fish. You see, tarpon at times can be very particular about what they eat. When my friend walked up to the table today tired and discouraged, I told him he was my glory and joy. I also told my wife today that she was my glory and joy. Why was I saying that today?

Some years ago, I was studying the Bible every day with a friend of mine. She said that she had no reason for living, and she did not feel good about losing her job. She never wanted to return to her workplace, or see any of the people she had worked with for many years. I read 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 with her, and then told her that she was my glory and joy. I doubt that many people have ever told you that you are their glory and joy. You may want to consider telling some believer, whom you know well, that he or she is your glory and joy and watch them look at you very strangely. But, they may ask you why you would say such a thing.

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

In 1 Thessalonians 2:20, Paul had just finished telling the Thessalonians how much they meant to him and the rest of the ministry team. He concluded his remarks by letting them know that they were the team's hope, joy and crown of exultation. People in Christ need to hear that they are our glory and joy from you, because Jesus feels that way about you too. We should not be friends that only drag our friends down, but friends that lift each other to Jesus with words like hope, joy, crown of exultation, and glory. Not only do we need to say such words, often, but we need to have those feelings in our hearts for other believers and develop relationships with other believers that nourish them on such language frequently.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we view our friends in Christ as our joy and glory.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we tell our friends in Christ that they are our joy and glory, and we mean it right from our hearts.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we neglect to communicate the joy and glory we feel for our friends in Christ, and instead, only focus upon faults, fears, and foibles in our friends in Christ.**

Application for Today

Today, I will thank God for the people I know who have received by faith the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I will let them know that they are my joy and glory in Christ. Are you ready to tell some people today that they are your joy and glory in Christ today?

8

Learning To Visit Your Friends Today

Even though you long to see your friends, you may not be able to go see them in person. So, you decide to send someone to visit for you and bring back a report. Whom do you send?

Paul showed that working with a team has many benefits. In this case, Timothy had visited Thessalonica with Paul and Silvanus. So, when it came to sending someone known to the Thessalonians, Timothy fit that task precisely. Paul also had great confidence in Timothy to bring strength and encouragement to the faith of the Thessalonians.

Perhaps you have made friends that have moved away. You long to see them, but you may not be able to go in person. Sometimes, you can send a friend. In all cases, you must be training people to be the kind of disciple you can send to your friends to encourage and strengthen them. We must all be disciples that encourage and strengthen the faith of friends when we arrive for a visit.

Day Thirty One

Left Behind Today

1 Thessalonians 3:1

“Therefore, when we could no endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone.”

Paul had several friends that helped him minister to the Gentiles. You may recall that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy greeted the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:1. At times, Paul sent Timothy on important missions, where they each labored in different cities for a while. In this case, the ministry team showed great flexibility, plus confidence in Timothy serving as a messenger for the team. Today we will focus upon the way the team felt about the Thessalonians.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:1, Paul used the phrase: "could endure it no longer." Paul had just concluded his testimony about the Thessalonians holding a dear place in the heart of the ministry team. The team eagerly looked forward to seeing them again. Within their hearts, they had to endure the strong desire to go to Thessalonica, but it was not possible for all the team to go.

In most lives, people do not have bonds of love with other believers, and often, with anyone. Many believers could not truthfully say that they are eager to see anyone. Yet, the ministry team had formed those strong bonds by imparting their lives and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Thessalonians. The ministry team made a deliberate effort to plan their lives, as the Lord Jesus directed them, to maintain their relationships with other believers. The team believed that God had established lasting spiritual friendships, according to the ministry entrusted to them.

Another important point about team ministry surfaced right here. If you build a single-person ministry, and not a team ministry, you will not have the benefit of greater flexibility. Jesus built the ministry team here so that it would have no problem splitting up, for a time, so that each member could go where needed. The team did not always have to stay together, and each team member could go where needed, as Jesus led them. Teams also make disciples.

Ultimately, as believers, we only have one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-7, Page 1830). Within that essential unity, Jesus leads a diversity of believers, individually gifted by the Holy Spirit, to maintain the bonds of unity, and function together as one body of Christ, the church, knit together in love. In Christ, we will never be left behind spiritually, because we can never be separated from Jesus or His love. Facing the cross, Jesus Himself said He was not alone, even after all the disciples had left Him, because the Father was with Him (John 16:32, Page 1689), who would forsake Him, by delivering Him to death.

So, when we cannot have the personal pleasure of visiting some friends in Christ, we can always count upon other friends to go for us, even if we must be left behind elsewhere. You can also be sure that when Jesus directs the paths of the ministry team, then God will never leave anyone outside His plans for important ministry.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we labor together in Christ, and go where Christ leads us.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage team members to go see other believers we love, so that we all may be strengthened together in Christ.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we refuse to follow Christ's leading, even it means separating the ministry team for a while. Sometimes our desire to learn more about our**

absent friends overcomes our desire to pursue other ministry goals. We lose our way in Christ when we ignore His efforts to use the ministry team at different places at the same time.

Application for Today

Today, I will watch Jesus use His worldwide ministry team to encourage believers around the world, but especially in my area of the world. For some of my friends, I know Jesus will lead them to form new ministry teams, and visit new places. Whom will you encourage today to visit people you love today?

Day Thirty Two

Strengthen and Encourage Today

1 Thessalonians 3:2

“and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,”

Many days at the beach one friend or another shows up to talk, read the Bible, and pray. In some cases, I have not seen the person for months or years. One day, a friend of mine came from up north to see me. He did not want to walk right up to me, but he wanted to surprise me. So, he came up quietly behind me, and then stepped out where I could see him. I knew he was coming to visit, but he did not answer my text and tell me exactly when. I was overjoyed to see my friend. Some friends bring spiritual strength and encouragement with them wherever they go.

As Paul, Silvanus and Timothy sat at Athens having been driven out of Thessalonica by the unbelievers there, at the right time, they sent Timothy back to Thessalonica. When you really miss other believers, especially those believers you have ministered to in the past, you want to see them and hear from them. In this case, the ministry team trusted Timothy to return with a spiritual purpose.

Paul identified Timothy as “our brother” and “God’s fellow worker” in the Gospel of Christ. First, Paul called Timothy our brother. Only two families live on earth: the family of God and the family of the devil. You belong to one or the other. Paul considered both Silvanus and Timothy to be brothers in Christ and part of the same family of God. We can only send born-again believers on missions to strengthen and encourage the faith other believers, for they alone have spiritual life and power from God. Faith always requires more strength. God intends to build

our faith in Him daily. Second, Paul called Timothy a fellow worker in the Gospel of Christ. Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires work, and that the workers must work together on one team, the team of Jesus Christ. He called His team the church, and He only has one church. Jesus is the head of the church and the church is the body of Jesus. Just as you move your hand to wash your face, so Jesus moved Timothy to strengthen and encourage the believers dwelling in Thessalonica.

Timothy went to Thessalonica for the spiritual purpose of strengthening and encouraging the faith of the Thessalonian believers. Do you have someone in your life that God sent to you to strengthen and encourage your faith? Are you someone who strengthens and encourages the faith of other believers that God can send on special missions for Him?

Summary for Today

- **We form strong bonds of friendship when we serve as fellow workers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ**
- **We strengthen bonds of friendship when we send friends in Christ to visit friends in Christ so that our friends in Christ may be strengthened and encouraged in Christ.**
- **We hinder bonds of friendship when we forget our friends in Christ and no longer think about them, pray for them, or take any steps to strengthen and encourage them in Christ.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to live today as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I may be able to visit one friend in Christ for another friend in Christ. I may be sent to strengthen and encourage the faith of friends in Christ. No matter what, I believe I am a brother and fellow worker with everyone on God's ministry team today, no matter where they live. Will you live today as a fellow worker in the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Day Thirty Three

Destined for This Today

1 Thessalonians 3:3

“so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.”

Have you ever thought that you experience your destiny on earth one day at a time? Does it run through your mind that today will be a part of your destiny? People use the word destiny in many different ways, meaning good and bad things. Paul spoke of his destiny because the Lord Jesus had revealed to him that afflictions lay in his future (Acts 9:16, Page 1716). People who joined with Paul would soon understand that Jesus had created a destiny for Paul which included afflictions.

Paul uses the term "afflictions" here to describe the problems he encountered. It means trouble, distress, hard circumstances, suffering. Paul used the term "afflictions" elsewhere to describe how no one should lose heart because he was suffering tribulations, because his sufferings were for the glory of the churches (Ephesians 3:13, Page 1830). Afflictions were part of the destiny of servants of God, and commended them as such servants (2 Corinthians 6:4, Page 1810).

Paul was keenly aware of the impact of "afflictions" upon loving relationships. Paul was concerned over the way his sufferings would affect the Thessalonians. Jesus never designed us to ignore the concerns of other believers, but rather to be very concerned for how others feel, especially when we watch people we love suffer for the Name of Jesus Christ. Once we form strong bonds of spiritual friendship, we live within a community of spiritual concern, and must never forget it. Our spiritual friends will want to know how we are doing, and what we are suffering. But Paul also used

the opportunity to reinforce the Thessalonians' knowledge of the love and wisdom of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ calls his people to endure afflictions for the sake of the Gospel. We struggle against rulers, powers, world forces of this darkness and spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12, Page 1834). Because of the overwhelming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and its eternal benefits, the devil opposes it with all he can muster against believers. Yet, God constrains the devil as we have seen previously (1 Corinthians 10:13, Page 1793). We should expect to be afflicted in this world as we labor for Christ, because it is a part of our destiny too.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we suffer together in Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we send friends like Timothy to let people know we care about them, and want them to know about our afflictions. Instead of going it alone, we triumph through our afflictions with the prayers, love and concern of our spiritual friends.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we give up under the weight of affliction, and never allow anyone to share and support us in Christ as we suffer afflictions for Him.**

Application for Today

Today, I know I will see my friends in Christ suffer affliction. Sooner or later, everyone sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ will suffer affliction. Today, I want to let my friends in Christ suffering affliction know they do not suffer alone, but rather we suffer together with God ministering to us during our affliction. Will you minister to the suffering today?

Day Thirty Four

Going To Suffer Affliction Today

1 Thessalonians 3:4

“For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.”

One day I was fishing with a friend of mine. We saw tarpon jumping through schools of bait near the beach. My friend castnet a live bait fish, hooked it up, and waited. He caught nothing, but he came with a friend too, and his friend hooked up something very big. His friend fought and fought that monster for about an hour. As I watched the fight, I mentioned to my friend that the fish never jumped. You see, tarpon almost always jump and jump and jump when hooked. The monster never jumped. Well, I am not a prophet, but I do have some experience with tarpon. I was very concerned they had hooked a shark, and they are very dangerous to land, unhook (if possible), and release. After about an hour of fighting the monster, they saw it was a stingray, about four feet across the wings. Needless to say, they were disappointed.

Paul did not rely just on experience to know that he would suffer affliction. He had the revelation from the Lord Jesus that told him about suffering for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The strong emphasis here in 1 Thessalonians 3:4 is upon preparing younger believers for the suffering of the ministry team.

As we have seen in the previous verses, Paul told the Thessalonians all about his life, and imparted it to them. Suffering would be a part of serving Jesus Christ. Believers will be called upon to suffer for Christ in many ways. But, suffering should never take the believer by surprise. We prosper through suffering and persecution. Our friends in Christ need us to

remember that Jesus told all of us that we would have afflictions in this life, and we should prepare our friends, especially young believers, for seeing us go through suffering for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to encourage them as they go through afflictions for the Lord Jesus Christ. **We need to let them know beforehand that afflictions will be a part of our lives in Christ, and it should not surprise us or cause us to doubt Jesus.**

Jesus gave His life on the cross to take upon Himself all the wrath of God, and experience the full punishment for sin demanded by the justice of God. In His holiness and righteousness, God judged sin, particularly my sin and your sin. For all eternity, Jesus died once and for all, paying the complete price for sin. By faith, we believe that Christ paid the price for my sin. He died for me. He has the power to forgive sins, and loves to forgive every person who comes to Him as a child, asking for His forgiveness by faith alone. You can express your faith in Jesus by accepting His gift of forgiveness today. The only way to face affliction triumphantly involves knowing that Jesus has forgiven you. Life starts with Christ in your heart and living by faith.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we tell our friends that normally all Christians will suffer for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we share our suffering with other believers, and let them know that more sufferings will come. Living in Christ together means that we experience the same kind of life that Jesus lived on earth, which included suffering for the Gospel.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we ignore suffering and imagine that true believers do not suffer affliction for the sake of Jesus. We should expect affliction, tell others to expect it, and endure it together.**

Application for Today

Today, I will let my friends in Christ know that God brings affliction into the lives of believers. I want to prepare them for my future afflictions, and theirs, so no one will be surprised. By the power Jesus Christ, we will endure and triumph as we go through afflictions. Will you be talking about affliction and triumph today?

Day Thirty Five

About Your Faith Today

1 Thessalonians 3:5

“for this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would have been in vain.”

I heard a story about a man who received the Gospel of Jesus Christ with great joy. He talked like a Christian, walked like a Christian, and acted like a Christian for about five days. At the end of five days, he went back to his old ways because he loved money more than he loved Jesus. Each of us has to make very serious choices about how we will live each day. The five-day-believer did not have anyone looking after him after he received Christ, and the tempter came to him and snared him.

Today you will be making a decision about staying close with your spiritual friends. Do you have someone on your mind that may be suffering temptation today? If not, are you even thinking about your spiritual friends? One key to standing firm with Christ is to hold the spiritual hands of as many friends as you can hold at once. Because they are spiritual hands, you are not limited to just two hands. As you suffer temptation, do you have friends seeking you out and praying for you? Do you have spiritual friends concerned enough about the tempter coming after you that they send a friend to see how you are doing? If so, welcome to the Thessalonian ministry team.

Paul used the phrase "find out about your faith." Are you staying in touch with friends about their faith? Paul made it a point to stay in touch with his friends who have made professions of faith. Paul linked this desire to stay in touch with his concern about the spiritual welfare of the

Thessalonians. **If no one cares about your spiritual welfare, then you have no friends in Christ.** If the people around you purposefully hinder you from growing in Christ, then those people are not your friends. You need to seek out friends who will seek out your spiritual welfare and promote spiritual friendship with you.

Now, let us look at this teaching about the tempter. We know that the tempter, the devil, tempts believers to stray away from Christ. In some case, people become shipwrecked in their faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20, Page 1855), so that they stop acting like Christians. Paul expressed his concern that he had labored night and day, but did it all in vain if the Thessalonians had fallen away. Do not misunderstand. Once a believer trusts in Jesus for salvation, then nothing can ever undo the salvation. Once saved means always saved (Romans 8:29-30, Page 1769-1770; John 5:24, Page 1662; 6:37-44, Page 1666; 1 Corinthians 3:15, Page 1785 ; Ephesians 1:5, Page 1827; Ephesians 4:30, Page 1831). You cannot lose your salvation, no matter what you do. But, you can live like you are not saved. If you live without concern for your friends, then you are not really their friend. Anytime you think about temptation, remember that God tempts no one (James 1:13, Page 1888), and always limits the temptation to what you can endure. God always provides a way out of each temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13, Page 1793). In Christ, we are more than victors for eternity, beginning today.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we have an intense concern for our spiritual friends, especially as they face temptation.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we take steps to find out how our spiritual friends are withstanding temptation. We need to pray for them, communicate with them, and spend time with them. Our friends should never face temptation without our spiritual concern and support.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we no longer care about how our spiritual friends are doing. Do you know anyone who is looking after you, and praying for you as you face temptation? If you fall, will anyone care? Time to stay in touch and stay close to our spiritual friends.**

Application for Today

Today, I will find out about my spiritual friends and see how they are facing temptation. I want them to know that I will pray with them, stand with them, and love them as they face temptation. I expect the same from my friends. Will you be finding out about someone's faith today, especially in light of temptation overtaking them?

9

Learning To Hear from Your Friends Today

Sometimes my friends hear what I said, even what I meant beyond the words that I spoke. We convey meaning in many ways. The expression on my face, the tone of my voice, and our body posture all convey meaning. Yet, Jesus taught us that we should not rely solely upon human insights to understand people. We must rely upon spiritual insight to understand other people. God wrote the Bible so that we would be able discern good and evil, and the power of God in our lives guides us in all things. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to help us understand people. The Father helps us understand people. Jesus always understands everyone perfectly. God is never deceived by anyone at any time.

When we make disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to hear from them and understand how they are doing spiritually. If we really love our friends in Christ, then we must listen to them spiritually, and discern if they are growing in Christ Jesus. We must share our concern for their spiritual welfare with them with careful words and loving deeds. Paul and the ministry team cared deeply for the Thessalonian believers, and so listened carefully to reports about the Thessalonians. Because they loved, they listened.

Day Thirty Six

Brought Us Good News Today

1 Thessalonians 3:6

“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we long to see you,”

Good news can come in many forms. I love to hear stories from my friends about how God has been working in their lives. I love to hear about marriages growing together, instead of apart. My heart rejoices when alcoholics turn to sobriety, or drug addicts leave their addiction. I especially love to hear that someone has accepted the gift of salvation from Jesus. The better I know the people involved, the better I like hearing the stories.

I like to tell new Christians that Sunday morning services should be a gathering of missionaries. Each of us works in a mission field all week—at work, at home, away from home, you name it. We all should be encouraging believers and making disciples in our communities. **We are all missionaries, all the time.**

In this case, the Thessalonian ministry team had just received Timothy back from his visit to Thessalonica. Timothy had left the team and went from Athens to Thessalonica to learn how they were doing in Christ. Now, he has returned, and tells a great story. Timothy reported three great things about the Thessalonians.

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

First, Timothy said that the Thessalonians still had faith and love. Paul had already commended the Thessalonians for their faith and love, and now Timothy confirmed it again. Do you have anyone that you know who stands in faith and love?

Second, Timothy reported that the Thessalonians were always thinking kindly toward the ministry team. When you are away from people, what do they say about you? Do you care what they say? The ministry team certainly cared what the Thessalonians were thinking. When your friends stop thinking kindly about you when you are not there, you should ask them what is up with them? What changed?

Third, Timothy related that the Thessalonians were longing to see the ministry team, and the feelings were mutual. Do you see the pattern here? These people loved each other, and time and geography could not break their spiritual concern and unity. With e-mail, telephones, Facebook, Twitter, and so many other modes of communication, we should have every opportunity to stay in touch. If you think kindly about one another, why not tell someone today how much you long to see them?

Jesus spends every day in our hearts for all eternity. From the moment we believed that He forgave all our sins, because He loved us and gave Himself for us, He has taken up permanent residence in our lives. Plus, the Father abides with us and the Holy Spirit indwells us. Each of them loves for us to talk to them, worship them, and spend time thinking about them and seeing them face to face in heaven. We should all long for that day, together, as one church.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we think kindly about our spiritual friends, and long to see them.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we hear good news about our spiritual friends standing in love and faith, and they still like us, just as we like them.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we no longer care what anyone thinks about us, and we have no interest in having spiritual friends. If we become uninterested in hearing about our friends, then we all start to dissolve our spiritual friendships.**

Application for Today

Today, I hope to hear from my Timothy about how you are doing, because I still care what we think about each other. I hope to hear good news about you, and I want you to know we still long to see you. What good news do you expect to hear from your spiritual friends today?

Day Thirty Seven

Comforted about You Today

1 Thessalonians 3:7

“for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;”

My friend purchased a condominium. Before he moved in, he laid some tile and painted the place. He then hired movers to help him. Weeks before the move, he went to the condo and received a key for the elevator and told them the day he was moving in. As He arrived with the movers on the appointed day, he noticed that the rugs near the elevator were being replaced, and signs were up regarding the rugs. My friend faced a real problem. He was paying the movers by the hour to sit because they could not unload. He contacted the condo and they said he could not move in that day. In fact, one person used very harsh language to tell him he could not move in because of the rugs. He moved just his bed in that day, and left the rest of his belongings on the moving truck. Before he left, he told the person who spoke harshly to him that he was leaving, to go and pray for the person who had spoken so harshly. He prayed, we prayed, and the next day apologies were made, and he moved right in. His faith prevailed in the way he handled a very difficult situation. At the beach table, we have talked a lot about how kindness overcomes harshness. The story of my friend's faith in responding to angry, harsh words encouraged us all.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:7, Paul talked about the comfort the ministry team experienced when Timothy brought word to them of the Thessalonians' faith. You see, hearing about the continuing faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ encourages us to continue in our faith. More particularly, Paul said that as the ministry team experienced their own

distress and affliction, the steadfast faith of the Thessalonians provided comfort for the team.

This word "comfort" means generally consoled, encouraged, cheered up. It has a variety of meanings, depending upon the context. In this verse, it carries the idea of being separated physically, but brought near spiritually and emotionally, resulting in cheerful lifting and settling of the troubles caused by distress and affliction.

We should take a strong lesson from this verse. We need to stay in touch with other believers, with whom we have shared our lives, so that we may be encouraged by their faith. Not only do we live together in a world-wide community of faith, but we also need the strength of faith shared among us to be comforted by the faith of others. One source of comfort will be the faith of our friends in Christ.

Notice in this passage that the ministry team sent Timothy to learn how the Thessalonians were doing spiritually. Sometimes, you have to take the initiative, like you sending a person, an e-mail, a telephone call, or whatever, to learn how your friends in Christ are doing when you are not there physically. Receiving good news can help you face distress and affliction. So, sometimes you have to reach out for that news.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we hear that our friends in Christ continue in their faith.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we face distress and affliction while hearing about the continuing faith of our friends in Christ.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we walk away from our faith. When we sin, we affect not only our own lives, but also everyone else connected to our lives by faith in Christ. Furthermore, we grieve the Holy Spirit, and displease the Father and Son. So, we should all live**

together in faith, encouraging one another by our continued faith. It will really encourage those who are suffering distress and affliction when they hear from us that we are doing well in Christ by faith.

Application for Today

Today, I want to hear from my friends that they are standing firm in their faith, so it will encourage me today. I also want my friends to know that I am standing in my faith, so it will comfort them as they face distress and affliction. What will your friends hear from you today?

Day Thirty Eight

We Really Live Today

1 Thessalonians 3:8

“for we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord today.”

Living. In some ways, a fairly simple idea. I saw a physician for my health exam. He did not look especially good, and mentioned he had his own health problems. His job helps people live longer and better by treating their physical bodies. As far as real living goes, that depends upon your spiritual life, not your physical life. Paul linked the life of the ministry team to the Thessalonians standing firm in the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:8, Paul talked about the idea of "standing firm" in the Lord. I noticed the term "Lord" too implies that we are obedient to Jesus as Lord. Paul told the Thessalonians here that he knew from Timothy that they were "standing firm" in Jesus. He was concerned that the tempter may have shaken their faith, but he heard they were standing firm in Christ. The emphasis in the text lies between the present, active standing and the living. Let me put it this way. The ministry team is having a great life when they know the churches are presently, actively, and continuously standing in their faith in Jesus.

Let me plumb some of the implications of that thought. Some parents only hear from their older children when the children need money, a place to live, or some other benefit from their parents. Some children even steal from their parents around the house, and you have to hide the valuables, or your medication, or your cash. When your children have problems, they often bring those problems home. The point is that your life will depend in some measure upon the problems your children are currently facing. Paul

took that idea and said the ministry team had formed such a strong bond with the Thessalonians, that he wanted them to know that his life depended upon their life. They had become intertwined spiritually.

For each of us, we must have an interest in our friends in Christ standing firm. You must take active steps to be sure that your friends are right now standing firm in Christ. If they are not, they must know your intense concern. I have watched waves at the beach pull the legs out from under adults and children. By God's grace, someone often catches the child from being swept out with the wave into deeper water. Usually, someone grabs the hand and holds on tightly while the wave sucks at the legs of the person. Each of us needs to be keenly aware of how our friends are standing in Christ, and be ready to help. Furthermore, we need to stay linked up to our friends to help each other stand firmly in Christ.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we link our lives spiritually together in Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we take steps to encourage and sustain our friends in Christ, so that they stand firm in Jesus.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we no longer care if our friends stand firm in Christ, or do nothing to help them stand in Christ. Sometimes, we must grab their hands and lift them up, so that they again stand firm in Christ.**

Application for Today

Today, I hope to hear that all my friends are standing firm in the Lord. If I hear otherwise, I want to reach out to them in love and help them stand firm today. Are you standing firm in the Lord today? Need help? Giving help?

Day Thirty Nine

Rejoicing over You Today

1 Thessalonians 3:9

“For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account,”

What makes you happy? Many people spend time each day thinking about their own happiness, or lack of it. Sometimes, people sink so low they cannot even imagine being happy. You know those people. No joy, no smiles, no fun, no love. At the other end of the spectrum, you see the incurably happy. Nothing will distract them from thoughts of nothing is wrong, nothing can go wrong, and everything is perfect. Those folks will not be confused by facts to the contrary, because they never want to anything but positive news. Paul and the ministry team dealt with real people, living real lives, every day, and found great joy in helping people grow up in Christ by imparting their lives to them. Do you remember Jesus saying: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it" (Luke 9:24, Page 1616). **Paul lost his life one day at a time, by imparting it to the Thessalonians, and found his life of joy in Christ by doing so.**

The ministry team found joy in the lives and faith of the Thessalonian believers. The ministry team did not know how to render adequate thanks to God for them. God had blessed the ministry team with so much joy over the Thessalonians that the team just had no way of returning thanks equal to the blessing of God. We can see several great lessons about joy right here. As you read 1 Thessalonians 3:9, think about these seven things (perhaps you would create your list from the verse):

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

1. Joy flows from thankful hearts.
2. Joy comes from God pouring His love through our lives into the lives of other people, particularly believers.
3. Joy deserves expression in our prayer lives by the measure God has made us rejoice.
4. Joy energizes our lives by the grace of God working within us.
5. Joy returns to us from our imparting our lives to other believers.
6. Joy should cover our prayer lives before God and He should hear it in our voices before Him.
7. Joy in our hearts should be shared with our spiritual friends who put it there.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we rejoice over the faith of our friends in Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we let God and our friends know how much joy they bring into our lives.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we no longer rejoice over the faith of our friends, or let God know how much we rejoice over His loving actions in our lives that produce so much joy.**

Application for Today

Today, I will be praying with joy in my heart in return for all the joy that my friends in Christ bring to my life. What will you be rejoicing about today?

Day Forty

Night and Day Keep Praying Today

1 Thessalonians 3:10

“as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?”

I had a friend facing surgery for a suspicious growth. I have spent considerable time praying for my friend, because I know he has a history of cancer. I have another friend that prayed and expressed faith that Jesus had forgiven her sins by faith, but I have not seen her at the beach lately. I find it easy and compelling to pray for my friends that I hear about, know about, and think about.

When I stay in touch with friends, I like to pray for my friends. In 1 Thessalonians 3:10, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the ministry team prayed for them night and day. Paul made several important points about praying, all in one verse.

1. **Purpose.** Pray with purpose, so that your mind does not drift and wander, and that you might not fall asleep.

2. **Rally.** Rally together to pray. The word "we" speaks to both collective and personal prayers, by all the ministry team.

3. **Always.** Always pray both night and day for the people you love in Christ. If you keep them on your mind, you will pray for them more often.

4. **Yearn.** Yearn to see the people face to face you pray for.

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

5. **Earnestly.** Earnestly pray for the people Jesus lays on your heart and mind.

6. **Rejoice.** Rejoice over your friends in Christ as you pray for them.

7. **Seek.** Seek the spiritual maturity of your friends in Christ as you pray for them.

Paul really wanted the Thessalonians to know the depths of the ministry team's love for them, so he told them he prayed for them night and day. They prayed night and day to see the Thessalonians again, and to complete what was lacking in their faith.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we pray seriously for our friends in Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we let our friends know that we pray night and day for them, with the aim that they will be fully complete in Christ.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fail to pray earnestly and often for our friends, seeking their benefit and maturity.**

Application for Today

Today, I will pray night and day for my friends in Christ, and I intend to pray with other people as a team, lifting up our friends so that all of us will stand spiritually complete before Jesus. Will you be praying earnestly today?

10

Learning Directions to Friends Today

Have you ever needed directions to find some place? Today, we can get directions from the internet in a flash. Sometimes those directions help us a lot, but at other times those directions may send us to parts of town we do not want to go. Yet, without directions, we can get lost and stay lost. The directions provide a path for us so that we get to the right place, and hopefully on time.

One day I was traveling to court when I noticed all the traffic stopped on the interstate. I left early to make court, but I knew that an accident on I-95 can really stop things for a long time. Things began to move slowly, but I was not sure. I had the hearing in court scheduled for a long time, and I did not want to miss that hearing. So, I called the court, and let the judge's judicial assistant know that I may be late. As I sat on the interstate parking lot for a while, I realized clearly that I could not direct my path anywhere, because I did not have control of the situation. I would get to court when traffic permitted.

Paul talked a lot about loving the Thessalonians and wanting to visit them. Yet, he knew that the only way he would have the opportunity to visit them would be if God would direct Paul's path to Thessalonica. Paul counted upon following God's directions for life and travel, so Paul prayed for God to direct his way to the Thessalonians. This whole practice of viewing our lives as directed by God will save us time, trouble and much heartache. Every day most of us meet people God has directed us to meet. I refer to them as divine appointments. When we focus our attention upon God directing our lives all day, every day, we will learn how God directs us to make new friends and strengthen existing friendships in Christ.

Day Forty One

Direct Our Way to You Today

1 Thessalonians 3:11

“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;”

I have a friend who seeks direction in his life. He never went straight from high school to college, and by his mid-twenties, had only completed a few college courses. He lived at home and did not have a full-time job. I have another friend seeking direction in life. He graduated from college, but soon decided that he disliked the work he has trained for. Both of my friends face the same question, what will I do with my life? What direction shall I take?

You see, one of my friends will be seeking direction for God the Father, God the Holy Spirit and God the Lord Jesus. The other friend will be looking in the mirror and deciding what to do. In our lives, we have to make many different decisions, and some of them make real differences for the rest of our lives. We need direction and we need it from God.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul described how he found direction. He has been telling the Thessalonians for nearly three chapters how much he loves them, how much he longs to see them, and his plans for visiting them. Then he shared how the ministry team wants to go and visit them, but only under the direction of the Father and Lord Jesus. **Paul counted upon God providing guidance at the right time and in the right way.** Let us take a look at how God guides us, using Paul as an example.

First, God guides us by developing relationships for His glory. Paul was always choosing between: (1) making new friends, and sharing the Gospel in new places, and (2) returning to see friends in places where he had already witnessed God planting churches. The ministry team sought direction from God, and they understood that God would lead them along the lines God had already started in their lives. Paul had a calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and gifted by God for that purpose. God will always use your life by using your spiritual gifts for His purposes.

Second, faith in God supports all of our decisions. We must really believe that God has a plan for our lives, and He really will direct our plans. He does not leave us looking in the mirror at ourselves, but rather looking at God our Father, God the Holy Spirit and God the Lord Jesus for guidance. One God in three Divine Persons, one guidance.

Third, notice for a moment the terms Paul used here. He looks for guidance from his Father, a term of power and endearment. I heard a man say once, "Why should I ask for my father's guidance? I am twenty-five years old." Of course his father was sitting right next to him, and he still lived with his father, and ate his father's food. The other term Paul used was Lord Jesus. The term Lord has special comfort and meaning in the context of seeking guidance. While we happily acknowledge Jesus as Lord in many contexts, we should follow Paul's lead here in realizing that the sovereignty of Jesus Christ certainly extends to planning our lives with supernatural power, love and vision. In one sense, our future amounts to obeying the commands of Jesus. We will not give Jesus commands about our future, but listen to His commands about our future.

Fourth, often we have our own hopes and desires about our lives. The Father and the Lord Jesus listen to us in prayer, and we let them know our hopes and desires. Ultimately, however, we invite our spiritual friends to pray for us too, that we might follow the leading of our Father and the Lord Jesus.

Fifth, God has a purpose for your life. As we live for God, we begin to understand that purpose for our lives, and how our lives become intertwined with other lives. God uses us for His purposes. We will not see our purpose in a mirror, but in the Word of God. We learn it in prayer,

both alone and in groups. We hear it in the wise counsel of our friends in Christ.

Summary for Today

Strong bonds of friendship form when we pray that God will lead our lives as Father and under the direction of the Lord Jesus.

- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we watch God build relationships under His leading to meet new people and develop their faith and ours under His loving care and grace.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we only look in the mirror for directions. Spiritual friendships depend upon everyone walking under the guidance of God the Father and the Lord Jesus. On a worldwide basis, we walk together in Christ.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage my friends seeking direction from God. God wants them to know their Father and the Lord Jesus both love them, and want to direct their lives for God's glory. From whom will you be seeking direction today?

Day Forty Two

Increase and Abound in Love Today

1 Thessalonians 3:12

“and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you.”

When was the last time someone told you that you were doing something very well, and then followed it up with encouragement to do even more? Most of us hear a lot more about our failures than our successes. When it comes to love, we all need to love more and more and more.

In 1 John 4:7 Page 1908, we read: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." We should notice several important points from this verse. First, only born-again Christians love with God's love. Non-Christians may do many nice things, but they will never love with God's love, because they have not been born of God and they do not know God. Second, all true love comes from God. While our capacity to love with God's love starts at the moment we receive the gift of salvation by faith from Jesus, we only exercise our capacity to love under the direction of God. The Holy Spirit bears the fruit of love in our lives (Galatians 5:22, Page 1825), and the first and greatest commandment requires us to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and with all our mind (Matthew 22:36-40, Page 1542).

When we put these ideas together, we see that Paul commended the Thessalonians for their great love, but also commanded them to love even more. Paul looked to the Lord Jesus to increase their love for one another, and for all men. Just as only born-again Christians can love with God's love, Jesus causes us to love more and

more. He empowers us to keep His commandments, for without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:1-7, Page 1686).

Finally, Paul emphasized that the ministry team loved the Thessalonians, and trusted Jesus to increase their love for them. Part of having spiritual friends involves watching Jesus develop greater love among His family members. He builds greater and greater love for each other, so that we all thrive on God's love. Notice that our prayer lives should be focused, in part, upon praying for God to increase our love more and more for the brethren.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we pray that God will fill our lives with love for God and each other.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we actually love each other more and more, with the love that only God provides.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fail to pray for love and implement love among our friends.**

Application for Today

Today, I want Jesus to cause me to love my friends in Christ more and more. Whom will you love today? Will you show them your love? Are you praying for love today?

Day Forty Three

Without Blame in Holiness Today

1 Thessalonians 3:13

“so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”

One day Jesus will appear with all His saints, and we will rise to meet Him. As we look forward to that day, what will our hearts be like then? Jesus works right now to establish our hearts without blame in holiness for the day He appears.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 Paul has just explained to the Thessalonians how much the ministry team misses them, and how they all long to see each other. Paul focused upon their love for one another. Then Paul linked that love to their holiness. Let me emphasize this huge point again. Holiness without blame comes, in part, from having more and more love for your spiritual friends.

Paul used the term "establish" here, and it means to strengthen, make firm, or fix. In 1 Thessalonians 3:2 Paul used the same term to describe the ministry team sending Timothy to Thessalonica to strengthen their faith. In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 Jesus strengthened the faith of the Thessalonians so that they will be blameless before Him when He appears with His saints. Paul further developed this great promise of the coming of Christ in the clouds where the saints alive on earth will be caught up into the air to meet Christ, Who is coming with all the believers who have already died in Christ.

So, Jesus told the Thessalonians that when He increased their love for one another, He also prepared them to be

blameless in holiness. As we love more, we become more holy, that is, more like God. As we saw yesterday, only those born of God and who know God truly love with God's love. Blameless also implies that we have not missed opportunities to love and to share God's love upon earth as His ministers. Therefore, if you long for more holiness in your life, then love more.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we love each other with the love of God, and let Jesus strengthen our hearts in love.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we believe that Jesus will cause us to love more and more, so that we will stand before Him without blame when He comes with all His saints.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do not love one another, and do not let Jesus strengthen us to love more, so that we will miss opportunities to love one another before He returns with all His saints.**

Application for Today

Today, I will see Jesus strengthening me to love people more and more, so that I will be without blame in holiness when He appears with all His saints. Will you let Jesus strengthen your heart in blameless holiness today?

11

Learning Sanctification and Honor Today

Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God breathed out His words through the writing of Paul to the Thessalonians. God produced a holy document, the Book of 1 Thessalonians. As we continue reading through this manual of making disciples, we can see that God builds love and helps us love one another in Christ Jesus.

God also reveals to us today how to live in holiness. We start our lives in Christ at the moment we receive the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. At that moment, we become new creatures in Jesus Christ, with new ministries and new jobs (2 Corinthians 5:16-19, Page 1809). Although we are completely forgiven in Christ at the moment of salvation, and ready for heaven, we still have areas in our lives that do not please God. Sanctification is a big word that means being holy and set apart for God's use. The same root word in Greek means holiness. God uses this root idea of holiness to describe believers as saints. Every born-again person in the New Testament was a saint, just as all born-again believers are saints today. God makes each person a saint the moment of salvation.

As saints, we still need to live in holiness. We do not lose our salvation because we sin. All believers have sin in their lives. We grow in holiness when the Lord works in our lives here on earth. God seeks to produce His holiness in the way we keep our bodies holy and have holy relationships with everyone else. Holiness and love go hand in hand in our lives. We must focus upon holiness today as an essential part of learning to be a disciple.

As saints, we must also learn to possess our bodies in sanctification and honor. We can use our bodies for good or evil. We can use our bodies for

immorality, or we can allow God to produce in us holiness and blessing. God promised that if we transgress and defraud other believers, then the Lord will be the avenger in all these things. Paul warned the believers to use their bodies for the glory of God, and to avoid lustful passion. We should be very careful to use our bodies for the glory of God if we intend to learn how to be disciples of Christ every day. You cannot separate the things you do with your body from the way you live for Christ. By the power of Jesus Christ, we can live in holiness and honor everyday with our bodies.

Day Forty Four

Walk and Please God Today

1 Thessalonians 4:1

“Finally, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.”

Receiving instruction can often make a huge difference in our lives. When I was a child, I liked to watch people surf. In many ways, I learned to surf watching the best surfers, and understanding how they moved their surfboards across the waves. I also learned at school, and at home, about how to think and how to live. Some of the things I learned at school, I frankly could care less about. But the things I learned about surfing, I was eager to put into practice. I really enjoyed surfing, and wanted to surf with greater and greater skill. I wanted to do many maneuvers on the waves. I was willing to receive instruction about surfing, although I could care less about art history being taught at school. One thing I received well, and the other thing--you know.

The word "received" in 1 Thessalonians 4:1, means take, take along, accept, learn. It points in this case to being completely accepted. It joins together the hearing of the truth with the proper application in our lives of the truth. We not only hear the truth, but we live the truth. Often when I try to learn something, I employ a mental and spiritual filter to see if I should be learning this new thing. Does it please God? Will it edify me? When I read the Bible, however, I know that God's Word never needs filtering, because I know that every word of Scripture has been breathed by God and will profit my life and soul (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Page 1864). The

Thessalonians completely accepted God's instructions about how to walk to please Him. **Even with this complete acceptance and application of the truth, the ministry team requested and exhorted them to excel still more.**

In this sense, God will always urge us to more and more spiritual growth in our lives. He will continually be sending us people to promote more spiritual growth, where we excel still more. In some case, God will be sending people to us to confront us about our sin, and cause us to seek repentance, confession, and the return to righteous living. In other cases, God will send us "excel" still more people. He plans for us to grow constantly in His grace, every day.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we receive the instruction the Lord Jesus Christ delivers to us through His word.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we excel still more in obedience and application of the Word of God, particularly in loving one another more and more.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we stop growing in Christ, and refuse to follow His commandment to excel still more.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to excel still more and more in following Jesus and doing what He wants with my life. Will you encourage your friends to excel in Christ more and more today?

Day Forty Five

The Authority of the Lord Jesus Today

1 Thessalonians 4:2

“for you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.”

Why should anyone believe what you tell them? Why do you believe some people, and not others? For most people, they tend to believe in a person. For example, many people in the United States focus upon a president like Barack Hussein Obama, and because they like him, they believe what he says. Jesus completely rejects such trust in mere men. We should not believe the Republican, Democrat, Independent, or any other politician based upon who said it. Who said it means nothing, what they said makes all the difference. Furthermore, just saying something does not make it true. A vast gulf can separate words spoken from truth lived. The issue will always be truth. Are people telling the truth? Christians must not be caught up in a cult of personality, but rather focus upon the truth of God.

Jesus taught the truth, lived the truth, and referred to Himself as the only truth by which people may know God the Father (John 14:6, Page 1684). Rather than placing trust in fallible people, our faith should be placed only in God and His truth. In this case, God gave commandments by the authority of the Lord Jesus. We must pattern our lives on the basis of God's commandments for living, not upon some man's ideas or beliefs. Jesus criticized the religious leaders of His day for exalting the traditions of men above the commandments of God (Matthew 15:3, Page 1527; Mark 7:5, Page 1570). Jesus said: "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." He further explained: "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:8-9, Page 1571).

The ministry team delivered the commandments of God to the Thessalonians, and they received them as what they truly were, not the words of men, but the word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13, Page 1847). Only Jesus had the words of life (John 6:68, Page 1667), and His disciples will always follow His commandments because they love Him (John 14:15, Page 1685). By God's grace, He gave us the words of life, so that we would live to righteousness with Him eternally. The authority of Jesus Christ as God, with all His perfections, stands behind the message of the Gospel. He speaks the truth, in love, for love, and with love, so that we may live in love with Him.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we receive the Word of God, and keep His commandments.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage each other by the authority of Christ to live in His truth and love.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we place men, or the traditions of men, above the Word of God.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to be put the Word of God above every other authority in my life. I want to stop following any tradition of man that conflicts with the commandments of God. Who will command your life today?

Day Forty Six

Abstain from Sexual Immorality Today

1 Thessalonians 4:3

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is that you abstain from sexual immorality.”

I hear guys at the beach constantly telling each other to look at some bikini-clad babe. One day I spoke with several of the men who claimed to be Christians. I read them the passage: "but everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28, Page 1507). The guys then tried to justify their behavior by saying that they only appreciated the beauty of the woman, just as you would appreciate a beautiful sunrise. I reminded them that I had heard that excuse many times, and their remarks did not seem in keeping with an appreciation of pure beauty, but rather a profound pattern of lust. Like all born-again men that I know, I struggle with lust, but I also remember that God created me for holiness. Remember, Paul had just told the Thessalonians that they were to appear blameless in holiness when Christ appears. Paul then developed the theme of sanctification, that is, how to become more and more holy, particularly holy in our sexuality.

God created sexual beings. We have a sexual desire that profoundly influences each one of us. Many people have a strong sex drive that lends them into all kinds of temptations. Our lust entices us to sin which leads to death (James 1:14-15, Page 1888). One of the things I love most about God is that He knows what I am like, and His word directly instructs me about my great problems in life. His word lifts me up with His power to live a holy life in Him.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 Paul addressed sexual immorality. He used a broad term for sexual immorality ("πορνείας"). That word covers all improper sexual acts, including adultery, homosexuality, sex outside of marriage, lusting, and coveting your neighbor's spouse. God's will for our lives means that we completely abstain from all forms of sexual immorality. Many people do not realize that abstaining requires the power of God in our lives. The advertising and programming on television and the internet promote all forms of sexual immorality. They give the impression that all forms of sexual expression are widely accepted and to oppose them amounts to bigotry. Such lies! God sets the standards for holiness and prosperous living. He bases His commandments on love for us, and His desire for us to flourish in holiness. He has commanded us to keep sex of all forms within marriage and nowhere else. Lusting will never be acceptable to God.

Jesus keeps the focus upon sanctification. **We become more holy as God becomes more and more in our lives.** He cleanses our lives for His service of love to our friends by removing from our lives the things that pollute our lives with sin. You will never be the friend you ought to be until God sanctifies your life. In passing, we should keep in mind that sanctification in the Bible has several aspects. In one sense, every believer was sanctified at the moment of salvation. God completely forgave your sins and eternally cleansed your life from sin. I will call this Instant Sanctification (Acts 26:18, Page 1752; 1 Corinthians 6:11, Page 1788). The Bible also contains passages about continuing sanctification, which I will call Daily Sanctification. These passages show us that God works in our lives to make us more holy, a process that lasts a lifetime. As we grow in our Christian lives, God wants us to grow in holiness, and often the Holy Spirit works in our lives to make us more holy in our behavior (1 Thessalonians 5:23, Page 1851; 1 Peter 3:15, Page 1897). God also described final sanctification. I will call it Heavenly Sanctification. In heaven, we will be finally sanctified so that we stand holy and blameless without any more sinning for eternity.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we focus our lives upon doing the will of God.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we abstain from sexual immorality, and live under the guidance of God's grace in our lives.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fall into sexual immorality, and destroy the work of God by engaging in sexual acts or thoughts displeasing to God and dangerous to our spiritual friends.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to be sanctified in all my life. I want to abstain from all sexual immorality, and live only for Jesus Christ. Will you abstain today from every form of sexual immorality? How about tomorrow? Even in your thoughts? Will you encourage your friends in Christ to do likewise?

Day Forty Seven

Sanctification and Honor Today

1 Thessalonians 4:4

“that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,”

At the beach, people tend place a large emphasis upon their bodies. They want to look good in their swimming suits. Many people, male and female, seek attention with their bodies. In our society today, many people want to live in sexual freedom and pursue whatever sexual activities they desire, when they desire, and with whom they may desire. Their desires make all the difference. Any pangs of conscience can be quickly ignored. The thrill of sex drives them on. But, Jesus has a totally different perspective upon our bodies and how we should use them.

God created our bodies for His use and perfections. The moment we confess Jesus Christ as Lord, we also must recognize that He is Lord of our bodies as well. In fact, He created our bodies and the Holy Spirit indwells all believers individually, and then joins individual believers into one holy building, the Church of Jesus Christ. God has particular plans for our bodies and we must honor them. God wants us to know how to possess our own bodies for sanctification and honor.

Sanctification is a big word that means holiness. The same root word describes believers as “saints.” Sanctification means that God sets us apart for His own use, and not our own whims. Sanctification means that we are holy, just as God is holy. When applied to our bodies, God means that we must present our bodies to Him as living sacrifices, ready to do the will of God.

Honor describes the positive value that God places upon our bodies. In a sense, God places a blessing upon us when He honors us. God intends for us to use our bodies to honor Him. If you intend to make strong friendships in Christ, then you must use your body at all times in ways that honor Christ. Believers must only seek sex from their spouses, and no one else, not even in their fantasies. Never think that if you do not do the physical act, you have not dishonored yourself. Jesus said we commit adultery in our minds as well as in our bodies. Paul taught us, under the inspiration of God, that every believer who commits immorality sins against his own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Sex brings about a spiritual union of people, for good or for evil (1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Page 1788).

Believers must be careful about what we wear, how to touch people, how you talk to people, and what suggestions we make. Do not misunderstand: you can certainly compliment people about the way they look, but you will be looking at more than just their physical appearance. God commanded us to view our bodies as His vessels that we must use for sanctification and honor.

Summary for Today

- **Strong Bonds of friendship form when we use our bodies for sanctification and honor.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we use our bodies to the glory of God, and not for immorality.**
- **We harm bonds of friendship when we use our bodies for immorality, and our friends in Christ suffer shame because of what do with our bodies.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to glorify God in my body by abstaining from immorality and honoring God in my body. I want to encourage my friends in Christ with my example and urge them to obey the command of God in using our bodies for His glory. Will you be using your body today to promote sanctification and honor before God?

Day Forty Eight

Lustful Passion Today

1 Thessalonians 4:5

“not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God,”

Jesus really knows all about advertising today. Just about anywhere I turn on television, I see advertising using sex to sell products. Lustful passion lives within everyone, and can pop out to produce sin and death. Jesus never gave in to lust or passion when it came to His body. He used His body for the glory of God every moment of every day for a lifetime. He gives us hope, power and joy to live holy lives before him. Jesus knows the hearts of people, and He knows that we need His power to control our minds, hearts and bodies to glorify Him.

In Galatians 5:24,(Page 1825), we read: "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Notice the two words "passions" and "desires." Paul used those same two words here in 1 Thessalonians 4:5. Paul never taught that sexual desire in itself is evil. Instead, Paul made the point that uncontrolled sexual desire and passion lead to sin, and specifically the dishonoring of our bodies. Paul taught us that we control our bodies by the power of Jesus Christ Who sanctifies our lives. When we consider the Galatians passage, we see that our flesh with its sinful passions has been completely crucified with Christ. **In other words, our bodies do not control us, but Christ has already won the victory over our flesh by crucifying it to the cross.** Powerful theology here leads to powerful living. I have heard many people talk about how natural sex outside of marriage is, and how it is now normal to live together before marriage, and even have children by multiple

people, all outside of marriage. Television promotes all of those "lifestyles," while Jesus commands us to sanctify our bodies for His use. He has already done the hard work by crucifying our flesh, with its passions and desires, on the cross. We could never have gained the victory ourselves, and people are often powerless outside of Christ to change their sexual behavior. But in Christ, with His power, our sexual passions and lusts no longer have to rule us. Now each of us makes a choice about overcoming our strong sexual desires, and living instead for Christ. We see Christ making very serious changes in our lives, as He sanctifies our bodies and lives for His use. God created sex, and gave one man and one woman joined in marriage a wonderful gift to share between them. Paul did not teach us to forsake sex in marriage, but rather to have sanctified bodies, whether married or single.

Finally, notice in 1 Thessalonians 4:5, that Paul does not want Christians acting like Gentiles who know all about sexual lustful passion, but they do not know God. Sure, unbelievers know all about licentious behavior, but they do not know God. They know nothing and care nothing about sanctification. They want to have great sex as often as possible. They love to indulge the desires of flesh and of the mind, while walking under the control of satan (Ephesians 2:2-3, Page 1828). Because we know God, we know we have been freed from our crucified bodies with its uncontrolled passions. Now Christ controls us, and He wants to make our entire lives holy to Him. For some of us, this freedom from sexual lustful desires stands as a great deliverance from slavery to the flesh, the devil and his deeds. In Christ, we know His power.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we honor our bodies and promote sanctification with all our friends.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we see our friends leaving lustful passions behind, and having Christ control all our lives to His glory.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we let our lustful passions burn within us, and never ask our friends for prayer and support.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage you to consider your body, along with its lust and desires, crucified with Christ. By the power of Christ, He will sanctify your body for His glory. Will you put away all lustful passion and desires today and live in sanctification with Jesus?

Day Forty Nine

The Lord Is the Avenger Today

1 Thessalonians 4:6

“and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we told you before and solemnly warned you.”

At times, some men treat women as sexual objects, even inside the church. Paul discussed the need to abstain from sexual immorality, and then extended the commandments against sexual sin with reasons to avoid lustful passion. Paul used the terms "transgress" and "defraud."

Transgress means that you exceed the clear boundaries of acceptable behavior. You know you should not have sex with anyone outside of marriage, but you will go ahead and do what you please. **You step over the sexual boundaries set by Jesus Christ.** Not only will you be tempted to transgress sexually, but the effect of your lustful passion will result in defrauding your brother. To defraud means that you take something that does not belong to you by using false words and false promises. You take something by stealth without paying for it.

Notice that Paul talks about defrauding the brother. When you have sex with a woman who is not your wife, you are defrauding your Christian brother. How will this woman ever explain to her husband what she has done with you? Your lustful passions not only destroy your life, but they also devastate the lives of others. Instead of presenting every female as a pure bride, you have now defrauded the present or future husband by taking something for your pleasure that never belonged to you and you

could never obtain in righteousness. Needless to say, the woman herself suffers and will never view you in the same light again. God, however, focuses the spiritual attention upon the man here.

God also pictured Jesus as the avenger of the people suffering from transgression, fraud, and sexual sin. While every believer can rest assured that Jesus will not condemn you so that you lose your salvation (Romans 8:1, Page 1768), yet, in this life your sin will bring forth heartache and problems for you and your sexual partner in sin. Furthermore, when you appear before the judgment seat of Christ in eternity, to receive your reward (2 Corinthians 5:10, Page 1809), your works will be tried with fire and you will suffer loss of reward (1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Page 1785).

Finally, we should remember that Paul had already warned the Thessalonians about the problems associated with sexual sins. Today, with sexual sin so prevalent inside and outside the church, we should all heed the solemn warning. We should remove from among ourselves every unrepentant brother involved in sexual immorality, until that believer repents and turns back to God (1 Corinthians 5:11-13, Page 1787). Our love for everyone should never fail, but we should be vigilant in our application of church discipline to encourage the unrepentant to turn back to a loving Father and the fellowship of the congregation.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we do not transgress and defraud our brethren. We must abstain from all sexual sin.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we remind our friends that Jesus is the avenger in matters of lustful passion, but also a gracious and compassionate God.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we transgress and defraud our brethren by letting loose our lustful passions, and so harm our sexual partners in sin. Ignoring the problems does not make them go away, but rather**

promotes them through silence and disobedience to God's Word.

Application for Today

Today, I want to remind my friends of Christ the avenger. He warns us not to transgress and defraud our brothers by committing sexual sin springing from our lustful passions. Today, I want to encourage my friends to heed the solemn warnings of Christ against sexual sin. Will you be walking away from sexual sin today?

Day Fifty

Called for Sanctification Today

1 Thessalonians 4:7

“For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”

I bought a new shirt because so many of my old shirts have holes, grease, paint and other marks on them. I like long sleeve shirts with high sun-protection value because I sit at the beach almost every day. Even though I sit in the shade of a pavilion, I still take a good bit of sun each day. I also tend to work on cars and things quite often. Keeping my shirt clean and working on vehicles do not go together for me. A friend of mine had a tire going flat slowly, and I really wanted to be sure that tire would be safe. My friend cannot walk very well and surely could not change a tire very easily. So, with my new shirt on, I wanted to be take the tire off the car, check it for leaks, fix the leak, and put it back on the car. Of course, I had to get my hands dirty and lay on the ground to place the jack properly. My new shirt came through just fine, but I had a purpose in buying that new shirt: to keep it clean and looking better than my old shirts.

When God bought each believer with the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, He had a purpose in buying us. He called us so that we would live set apart for His purposes, to live in holiness to Him. As Paul has mentioned before, impurity comes into spiritual lives when we do not live for God. Paul specifically mentioned sexual immorality. When we live like unsaved people, then our bodies become impure.

You may recall that Paul described our bodies as vessels. The very idea of a vessel means that it contains something. In this case, the vessel of our body contains our spirit and the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit of

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

God lives within us. He seeks to produce a life of joy, happiness, peace and comfort. We must make daily decisions about how to use our bodies for the glory of God.

Our bodies have very strong sexual desires. Paul referred to them as lustful passions. Those passions will cause us to veer away from God's plans for our vessels. Because our vessels have a spiritual purpose, we sin and mess up God's plans for our lives when we use our vessels for impurity. So many people today think they can use their vessels as amusement parks. They indulge their bodies in the desires of the flesh and the desires of the mind. They live in impurity and tempt other people to join them in such impurity. As believers, we must know that God has called us not for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. God seeks to produce more and more holiness in the way we live our lives, so that His holiness excludes impurity in our lives. Making disciples for Jesus Christ means that I use my body for His glory, and not my passions.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we live together in purity and pursue God's calling of sanctification.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage our friends to live in sanctification and avoid sexual immorality.**
- **We harm bonds of friendship when we engage in sexual immorality in our minds or with our bodies.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to avoid all sexual impurity in my life. I do not want to think impure thoughts or commit impure acts. I do not even want to suggest bad things to anyone today. Instead, I want to focus my mind upon the calling of God. I want to wear my new life without spot or blemish in Christ. What will you be doing with your body today?

Day Fifty One

Rejecting God Today

1 Thessalonians 4:8

“So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”

I watched many politicians talk about the great differences they have between their own personal, religious views and the political views they follow when governing the country. They say they personally hate abortion, but vote for every abortion law that comes before them. They claim to attend church, and love God. Yet, they often completely separate their personal religious beliefs from their actions as lawmakers. They reject what God said in the Bible in favor of political power. They prefer to reject their own faith in God and God Himself. Yet, they still hold up their “personal faith,” but never let it interfere with their legal duties. If they think that rejecting God will ever be o.k. with God, then they could never be more mistaken about their own lack of true faith. God told us that living in any form of sexual immorality is unacceptable for believers, yet lawmakers promote homosexuality, immorality of all kinds, and all kinds of evil. They force believers to live like unbelievers, or face government sanctions.

While we may find it easy to criticize lawmakers for their schizophrenic approach to faith that is truly crazy, we often accept such crazy behavior in our lives. Paul taught about the need to live in sanctification, and then wrote that if you reject such teaching, you are not rejecting the teaching of men, but you are rejecting God who gives the Holy Spirit to all believers. The Holy Spirit helps you live in sanctification, without immorality. The lawmakers voting for immorality long ago rejected God who gives the Holy Spirit to true believers.

The Holy Spirit lives within each believer and takes up residence in our lives at the moment of salvation. God commands us to walk in the Holy Spirit and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When we reject the Word of God, we reject the God who gives us the Holy Spirit. Paul linked the activity of the Holy Spirit with avoiding immorality in our lives. If we live like evil politicians, then we reject the Holy Spirit working in our lives. We cannot live one way on Sunday and then another way the rest of the week. We cannot be a spiritual politician on any day. We must live in the Holy Spirit every day, so that we enjoy living each day in God.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we pursue sanctification and sexual purity in our lives, especially with other believers.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we find encouragement from other believers to accept the Word of God, and live with the Holy Spirit sanctifying our lives daily.**
- **We harm bonds of friendship when we indulge sexual desires in our minds or our bodies, and so reject God who gives the Holy Spirit to us.**

Application for Today

I want to live without any craziness in my life today. I do not want to reject God and live for myself. I want to focus my mind upon rejecting sexual immorality, and pursuing sanctification in my life. Will you reject the ways of sexual immorality or the ways God today?

Day Fifty Two

The Love of the Brethren Today

1 Thessalonians 4:9

“Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”

I frequently see my believing friends demonstrate love for the brethren. Just before Thanksgiving one year, a believer and his wife dropped by the table at the beach and gave me large box with a turkey and all the fixings with it. He mentioned that he appreciated the beach ministry. I thanked them for the precious gift. He saw me a few weeks later and asked if I liked the turkey. I said I gave it away and thanked him for his gift. It allowed me to share the love of God with others by sharing food.

Paul noticed the great love of the Thessalonians. He wrote to them to reveal new truths from God so that they would live sanctified lives, pleasing to God. Yet, when it came to their love for the brethren, Paul said God taught them directly about loving the brethren. Paul said he had no need to write them anything about it. Notice, however, that by writing this verse he let them know that he noticed their great love, and praised them for their love.

Making disciples means that we learn to notice and encourage the faithful love of other believers. How many times have we noticed that God has produced great qualities, like love, in a believer's life and never mentioned it to them. Paul frequently praised the Thessalonians, but never flattered them. He always meant it and thanked God for their faithfulness to God.

Paul also recognized that God teaches believers to love one another. The Thessalonians loved one another because God had taught them to love one another. Do not miss the point here. Every believer must be taught to love other believers. While it comes naturally in some ways, many believers I know have people in their lives they really do not like. If they thought about it, they do not love them. Only God produces His love in our lives, but we must learn from God how to love people, and particularly how to love them as God loves them. He is always willing to teach, but are we always learning from God how to love people?

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we love people with the love of God.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we notice and encourage other believers who love people with the love of God.**
- **We harm strong bonds of friendship when we do not love other people, and when we never mention the love of believers for one another.**

Application for Today

I want to love my friends in Christ today just as God teaches me to love each individual. Each person may require different acts of love, and so I want to listen to God show me how to love people one person at a time. Will you learn to love each person today?

Day Fifty Three

Excelling Still More Today

1 Thessalonians 4:10

“for indeed you do practice it toward the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.”

Some of my friends attend church regularly, but have never been forgiven of their sins. One day I spoke with a man who attends a local church, with a seminary preacher. I asked him a simple question: "If you were to die tonight, and stand before Jesus, and Jesus asked you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?'" He responded that he tried to live by the golden rule. I read to him certain passages in the Bible that explained that we are all sinners, and the wages of sin is death. Therefore, being good and doing good will never deliver us from the death penalty of sin. I read him other verses that explain that Jesus died, and took our sins upon Himself when He died upon the cross. He paid the death penalty for my sins. By faith, I believe that Jesus died in my place for my sins, and by His death and resurrection I go free. By His wounds, I now am healed. You see, I had been praying how to reach this very man with the message of the Gospel, because I love him and the other people I meet at the beach. Like we read about yesterday, I need to learn how to love each individual person with God's love. The Thessalonians were known for loving people with God's love, and Paul encouraged them to love still more.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:10 Paul emphasized that the Thessalonians had been taught to love by God, and the testimony of their love to all the people in their area was well known among the other churches. You see, they just loved to love people around them. Notice that Paul not only praised them for their love and testimony of love, but he also told them to love even more. Do you have anyone in your life that encourages you to love still

more? Do you praise your friends for their love of people? Do you encourage your friends to develop a reputation for loving people that glorifies God? Paul wanted everyone to know the testimony of love coming from the Thessalonian church. This group of believers had been persecuted for their faith, and yet they had learned directly from God how to love people.

People watch not only what believers say, but also what we practice. The original text here indicates that the Thessalonians were continually practicing their love, and people noticed their continuous behavior. They not only talked about love, but they showed their love for people. Paul knew that you cannot love people too much, unless you fall into idolatry (1 Samuel 2:29, Page 440). You also cannot exhaust God's supply of love for people on this earth.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we practice love towards people all around us.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when praise our friends for their love in Christ, and encourage them to excel still more.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fail to love people, or fail to encourage people to excel still more in love.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to love people more and more. I also want to encourage my friends in Christ to excel still more in their love for people. Will you encourage your friends to love people more and more today?

12

Learning the Quiet and Simple Life Today

Some of my friends have more ambition that you can shake a stick at. They want to earn money, drive nice cars, have a big home with a pool, send their children to the best schools, and save money for a comfortable retirement. I have other friends who lost their ambitions long ago to disability, divorce, drinking, drug addiction, outbursts of anger, and many other soul-crippling events.

God wants to give us ambition for living every day. He does not mean to have worldly ambitions leading to favor with the world, but rather ambitions that will lead to favor with God. In 1 Thessalonians God described a quiet and simple life for believers that will bring great blessings into their lives.

Donald Trump won the election for President of the United States. He appealed to “blue-collar” workers and more white women voted for him than for the first female presidential candidate. Mr. Trump, the billionaire, campaigned to the simple people with simple ambitions. He talked with them about all the things they faced in their lives. Mr. Trump made many promises, and, even if kept them all as President, he could never provide the ambitions that God describes as pleasing Him. Human government will never provide the true solutions and goals for living. Only following God’s directions for living a quiet and simple life, working with our hands, and earning our own living, will truly allow us to have a good testimony to the world around us. We must never depend upon the government or other human institutions to provide a better life, although God designed them for just such a purpose.

Day Fifty Four

The Quiet Life Today

1 Thessalonians 4:11

“and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your own hands, just as we commanded you.”

I really enjoy meeting all kinds of people at the beach every day. I sometimes go to a table, sit down, and expect to have time to read my Bible quietly. Frequently, however, the Lord Jesus has other plans and He sends someone to talk with me. One day I went to my usual table and a man I had met a few times was sitting there reading a book. I left my Bible on the table, and went to the railing to watch the beautiful evening on the ocean. Soon he came over to the railing and asked if we could pray for our mutual friend in the hospital. He told me about a man who had broken his neck while riding his bike. He was now paralyzed on the left side of his body, and had been in the hospital for over a month. Our friend was just learning to move his left hand some, but he could not even begin to walk. He was working on moving with physical therapy. As I stood at that railing, I thought how blessed I am to walk, talk, and move as I wish. I was also very happy my friend had asked me to pray with him, because I also shared with him how he could receive forgiveness of sins by simply believing that Christ died for him on the cross, and now lives as the risen Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11 Paul talked all about ambition. My injured friend now has the ambition to regain the use of his hand and arm, and to learn to walk again. You see, he had broken his neck, and had a plate installed to join his neck vertebrae together. We all have ambitions in life.

Paul described three ambitions that every Christian should hold dear in his or her heart.

First, our ambition should be to lead a quiet life. This term quiet ("ἡσυχάζειν ") means to be silent, or to quiet down and give your attention to someone speaking (Acts 22:2, Page 1744). In our case, we need to quiet down and listen to the Lord Jesus speaking to us.

Second, we must attend to our own business. The literal phrase ("πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια") means to do your own things, or to mind your own business. The word means that you take care of your own issues first, before you take on someone else's problems or concerns.

Third, we must work with our own hands. The emphasis falls upon being self-sufficient by earning your own living. I see many men who do not have regular work, but actually seek work. Paul commanded the Thessalonians to be self-sufficient and not rely upon charity from others. Working forms an important part of the Christian life for every able-bodied person.

Finally, Paul repeated that he has already commanded the Thessalonians to live according to these ambitions. Christ gives every believer tremendous freedom in pursuing so many areas of life, but He also provides commands that guide us in our lives. With every command, Christ also makes available the spiritual power to carry out each command.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we follow the commands of Christ regarding our ambitions for life.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we make it our ambition to lead a quiet life, attend to our own business, and work with our own hands.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we lose control of our lives and live wantonly, and acting like busybodies**

poking our noses into other people's business where our noses do not belong, and we start depending upon the charity of others when we should be working with our own hands.

Application for Today

Today, I want to follow the ambitions that Jesus Christ has for my life. What ambitions will you be following today?

Day Fifty Five

Not Be in Any Need Today

1 Thessalonians 4:12

“so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.”

I see homeless men nearly every day. I often talk with them, and learn many things from them. Recently, a man shared with me how he was in an automobile accident, had his hip smashed, and had to undergo serious surgery. It left him unable to walk for months. After the hospital, he went to a rehab facility for about two weeks or so. He arrived in a wheel chair, and then was discharged in a wheel chair with about twenty dollars and a bus ticket. He was homeless when he went in and homeless when he came out. This man wheeled his chair into church nearly every Sunday and made friends with the congregation. Over time, he regained the ability to walk and work. He performed work around the building and the people took care of him. This man wanted to work, but was unable to work for a long time. Although he can walk now, he cannot run. Perhaps someday he will. In the present economy in Florida, many homeless men actually seek work, but cannot find it. While some men physically cannot work, and other men cannot find work which they are able to do, other people use Christianity as an excuse not to work.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:12, Paul talked about how we should live toward non-Christians, whom he called "outsiders." **We need to be careful how we live so that we will be good witnesses.** In a courtroom, the witness sits and talks from a chair. The judge often looks carefully at the witness, and the attorneys look at the witness, and the jury looks at the witness. In a non-jury trial, the judge often takes a longer look at the witness. The judge will have to make a final decision about who is telling

the truth, and that often depends upon the entire communication from the witness. The judge evaluates the words, emotions, tone, posture and everything about the witness. Furthermore, you can count upon cross-examination from the other attorney about your testimony.

As Christians, we should expect cross-examination from outsiders. They will look at us and see if we live unruly lives, or if we are busybodies, or if we depend upon charity because we refuse to work. Let me be clear. If you have worked for many years, and have paid into the unemployment compensation fund, and then were laid off, you have every right to seek unemployment compensation while you look for other work. Likewise, if you worked and become disabled, you have every right to seek assistance from the government because you are no longer able to work. Paul meant that those Christians who are able to work, but do not seek work, cause unbelievers to lose respect for Christians. With our mouths we proclaim Christ, but with our lives we proclaim laziness, if we refuse to work and are able to do so. Paul linked our ambitions to our testimony for Christ in the community.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we remain careful to work and provide for ourselves, and encourage one another to work.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we provide work for other Christians, and preserve our testimony toward outsiders by not being in any need. Christ provides for us every day.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we become needy people in the community of outsiders because we refuse to work and live in need of government or social services.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage my Christian friends who can work, but refuse to work, to consider their testimony toward outsiders. Will you work today and so behave properly toward outsiders?

13

Learning about Believers

Asleep in Jesus Today

People often ask me about what happens after you die. Many other people share with me their experiences where they believe they have travelled to heaven and come back to talk about it. Virtually no one has reported that things after death can be very bad. Yet, God reveals in the Bible that if you do not obey Jesus Christ, the wrath of God abides upon you already. If you do not accept the free gift of eternal life from Jesus Christ during your lifetime on earth, then it will be too late the moment you die. Jesus described a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth as the final destiny of all people who were never born again of the Holy Spirit during their lives on earth.

I also preach funerals from time to time for my friends and their families. God knows all about grieving, and He never likens it to how Gentiles grieve. As believers, we do not grieve like Gentiles who have no hope. We have this great hope that at the moment of death, every believer will be present with Jesus in Paradise, just like the thief on the cross. Therefore, believers need not languish in grief for months or years. We surely grieve, but we also have great hope in Jesus, because every believer who died on earth will be coming with Jesus when He appears in the clouds.

My mother died in 2004, just before four hurricanes swept into Central Florida. My mother hated hurricanes. She died in a busy house, sitting in chair, holding her Bible, and studying her Sunday School lesson. At the moment she went to be with Jesus in Paradise, no one was in the house. Jesus took her home at just the right time. Jesus comforted me with a particular passage: “But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where God calls the Lord ‘THE GOD

OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB.' Now He is not the God the dead but of the living; for all live to Him" (Luke 20:37-38, Page 1642). I take great comfort that my friends in Christ are alive with Christ in Paradise the moment their bodies die on earth.

Day Fifty Six

Hoping for Resurrection Today

1 Thessalonians 4:13

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.”

This passage forms the basis for comforting one another regarding the death of believers in Jesus Christ. Sometimes referred to as the Rapture, Jesus will return in the clouds with those dead in Christ. With the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, the dead in Christ will be raised. Paul also described the order of resurrection: (1) all those believers who have died in Christ before the moment of the Rapture; and (2) those believers who are alive on the day of the Rapture.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul turned to the subject of teaching hope. Every Christian should be hoping based upon revelation from God concerning the future of those believers who have died. Jesus wants us to know and to hope in Him. Paul made three important points here.

First, God wants you to know about all the believers who "are asleep." Jesus used this same symbolic speech to describe Lazarus: "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep" (John 11:11, Page 1677). John explained that Jesus meant: "Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they [His disciples] thought He was speaking of literal sleep" (John 11:13, Page 1677). In front of His disciples, and others, Jesus called Lazarus to come out of the tomb, and Lazarus came

out still bound hand and foot with wrappings, and a cloth wrapped over his face (John 11:44, Page 1679). Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and, in the same way, Jesus will raise the bodies of every person in Christ at the Rapture. I have met many people who tell me that they either died or had a near death experience, and they have seen the other side. They said it was nothing to fear, but peaceful. The only reliable source of knowledge about the after-life is the revelation of God contained in the Bible. I have never met anyone in the flesh who had the power to resurrect the dead. I am sure many people are quite sincere in telling me what they saw, or felt, when they were near death, but often they were hearing the devil comfort them, and not Jesus. Believers do not rely upon our own experience to know the future, but rather upon the Word of God. He wants you to learn from Him about the future, and He has a lot to say about the future. Jesus holds the future, and controls the whole universe to follow His pre-ordained plans. We must listen to Him, and not the experience of people who have no real view of the future. Remember, that Jesus called Himself the first fruits of the resurrection, because He was the first person to have a glorified body (1 Corinthians 15:20, Page 1801). When He raised Lazarus and others during His earthly ministry, they did not get a new glorified body, that would never decay, but they were restored to their old body, destined to die again and undergo decay. When Christ returns at the Rapture, He will raise His own children, and give them glorified bodies that will never decay.

Second, Jesus does not want you to grieve hopelessly over your deceased Christian friends. They are only sleeping in the sense that their bodies have been placed in a tomb, to undergo decay. At the moment a believer dies, they are "absent from the body," but immediately "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6-8, Page 1809). Remember that resurrection almost always refers to bodily resurrection, because your spirit has been present with Jesus in Paradise from the moment you died (Luke 23:43, Page 1650). Therefore, you leave your body on earth, but your spirit goes home immediately to be with Jesus. Spiritually, you are present and at home with Jesus from the moment you die. We do not hopelessly grieve over them because we know they are with Jesus, and nothing could be better than that assurance and fact.

Third, like Jesus, Christians grieve over their dead loved ones. Our grieving, however, will never be with the sense of permanent loss, or

complete desolation, felt by unbelievers. They have no assurance, but in fact, have lived in fear of death for a lifetime (Hebrews 2:14, Page 1871). Jesus has freed us from the fear of death, and has broken the bondage of sinful slavery. **Therefore, we do not grieve as unbelievers, but live in freedom and knowledge coming from Jesus alone.**

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we know that Jesus lives forever, and our Christian friends have only fallen asleep in their bodies. Spiritually, they live with Christ today.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage each other to know and remember that we do not grieve as Gentiles over those who sleep in Christ.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fail to remind our friends that bodily death only means our Christian friends are at home with Jesus.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage my Christian friends to avoid grieving hopelessly for dead Christians, because death only refers to being absent from the body, and present with the Lord. Whom will you lift up with the knowledge of death and resurrection today?

Day Fifty Seven

Fallen Asleep in Jesus Today

1 Thessalonians 4:14

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ dominates the entire New Testament, and the destiny of every believer. Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, everything about Christianity would be a lie (1 Corinthians 15:15-18, Page 1801). In the same way, however, the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ empowers the believer's present life, and provides hope for the future.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 Paul revealed two critical points to guide our lives. Both of those points rest squarely upon the fact of the death and bodily resurrection of Christ. Jesus by the grace of God tasted death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9, Page 1871). Now, Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor because of His suffering for us. Because He was raised with an imperishable, immortal, glorified body, He stands ready to raise the bodies of all believers from decay and destruction. Please recall that spiritually, every believer is at home with Jesus from the moment they die. The Bible knows nothing of purgatory or soul sleep. Man, prompted by the devil, invented those lies and traditions for sinful reasons. Paul taught us important lessons about bodily death and bodily resurrection.

First, because Christ died and was resurrected, He returned to heaven to live eternally with the God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. God raised Jesus, "putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:24, Page 1702). The moment we die physically, we go to be with Jesus. When Jesus was explaining life after

death to the Sadducees, He told them that He was the God of Abraham, the God Isaac (Abraham's son), and the God of Jacob (Isaac's son). Jesus proclaimed that He was the God of the living, not of the dead (Matthew 22:32, Page 1541). Jesus meant that even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died physically nearly two thousand years previously, they were alive today spiritually and with God. He was still their God after their bodies died, and they were with God even before their bodies were resurrected. We should always remember that death never separates believers from God, because it only separates us from our earthly bodies (Romans 8:38-39, Page 1770).

Second, Jesus will bring every believer with Him to the Rapture for bodily resurrection. Because death only affects our physical bodies, believers remain forever joined to Christ. When Jesus comes back to the clouds of earth to resurrect the bodies of believers, He comes back with the believers who have been at home with Him in heaven ever since they fell asleep (physical death). I can see my future right now. If I have died before the Rapture, then I will be coming with Jesus from heaven to the clouds of earth. He will resurrect my body in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, with the sound of a trumpet, and I will be changed instantly (1 Corinthians 15:52, Page 1803). But I will have been with Him ever since the day that I died.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we remind each other of the resurrection of our bodies, and the eternal spiritual union we have with Jesus.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we look forward together to the day when we be "home with Jesus" and coming back with Him to see our bodies resurrected in glory.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we neglect the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in our lives and forget about the Rapture of the saints.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to remind my friends that Jesus will resurrect the bodies of the saints, and every believer already asleep in Jesus will be coming with Him at the Rapture. Will you be looking for Jesus today?

Day Fifty Eight

Resurrected First or Second Today

1 Thessalonians 4:15

“For this we say to you by word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

Why should anyone believe what you say? For many people, they rely upon their past experience to guide other people. They may have had experience with illegal drugs, alcoholism, infidelity, homosexuality, or other sinful actions. The Bible, however, does not present human experience as a reliable guide. In fact, the wisdom of this world never leads anyone to faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Instead, God gave us His word through His messengers to reveal His ways, which are not our ways, and His thoughts, which are not our thoughts.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul boldly proclaimed that he was speaking the word of the Lord. As the Holy Spirit of God moves men, they speak for God. We can rely always upon the Bible, for it records for us the inerrant revelation of God. It does not contain any errors, and, properly interpreted, presents to us all that we need for life. So, when Paul tells us that he is speaking the word of the Lord, we know God is revealing something very important to us that we would not have known otherwise. **In this case, Paul reveals to us the order of resurrection for the saints at the Rapture.**

First, all the saints who have died before the Rapture will be resurrected before all the saints who are still alive when Jesus returns in the clouds to resurrect the saints. If the Rapture happened right now, I know my believing mother, who died years ago, would come with Jesus to the

clouds, and she would receive her resurrected body before me. In the same twinkling of an eye, I would then join Jesus in the clouds and receive a resurrected body.

Second, some believers will remain and be alive when the Lord Jesus returns in the clouds to resurrect the saints. Christianity is not some passing fad that time will defeat. The Creator of this world, who became flesh and dwelt among men, suffered death on a cross and then took His life up again, and resurrected His body in glory. He will return to earth. The certainty of the enduring legacy of Christ's promises to His own disciples thousands of years ago still warms our hearts with the knowledge that He will return to resurrect His saints. We know that our loved ones in Christ live with Him right now, and they have first place in line for the day of resurrection. Of course, all of us living in Christ will have the second spot.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we listen to the Word of God leading us to love and live in Jesus Christ and His forgiveness.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we remember that the saints who have died before us are only asleep with Jesus, and live with Him even now. He will resurrect them at the Rapture, and then all of us who remain alive in Christ.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we ignore the word of the Lord, and fail to live according to His promises of resurrection and eternal life.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to remind my friends that the Word of the Lord tells us about the order of resurrection: asleep in Christ first, then those alive at the Rapture. Are you ready for the Rapture today?

Day Fifty Four

Rising First Today

1 Thessalonians 4:16

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”

Jesus will resurrect the body of every believer. Think about that fact for a minute. No believer will be left out, and every believer will receive a glorified body. One day, Jesus will resurrect you, if you are in Christ. Jesus loves to provide details of that resurrection day, so we can see how this particular moment of resurrection fits into His total plan for the future of believers and the entire world.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 we see that the Lord Jesus comes to resurrect the bodies of His saints. The Lord Jesus Himself comes to the resurrection with a shout of command. The word used here for "shout" means to shout a command, or issue a command with loud authority. In John 11:43 (Page 1679), Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth from the tomb, and back to life. Lazarus did not have a resurrected body, but his old body was revived.

Next, we read that Jesus will come with the voice of the archangel. The only other mention in Scripture of the word "archangel" occurs in Jude 1:9 (Page 1912) and refers to "Michael the archangel." Therefore, perhaps Michael will shout as Jesus descends from heaven.

Finally, the trumpet of God will sound forth. In 1 Corinthians 15:52 (Page 1802), we know that the dead will be raised imperishable at the

sound of the last trumpet, in the twinkling of an eye. Again, Jesus emphasized that the dead in Christ shall be raised first.

As a whole, this verse adds details to the picture of the resurrection of the bodies of the saints. **Each believer looks forward to hearing the Savior's voice.** In John 5:28-29 (Page 1663), Jesus explained that all the dead would hear His voice, and the believers would be resurrected to life, and the unbelievers to a resurrection of judgment. As believers, we know that when we die, we depart our physical bodies and go home to be with Jesus. At the Rapture, Jesus will bring us back with Him, and He will resurrect our bodies. We shall forever be with Him, in our glorified and imperishable bodies.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we expect to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus, commanding the resurrection of the bodies of believers from all over the world.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we comfort and encourage each other by looking to the future, and listening for the commanding shout of Christ, the voice of the archangel, and the last trumpet.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we no longer care about the future, and lose our hope of seeing Jesus face to face, with resurrected bodies, to dwell with Him forever.**

Application for Today

Today, I will be listening for resurrection. I know Jesus may come with His shout at any moment. What will you hear today?

Day Fifty Five

Be with the Lord Today

1 Thessalonians 4:17

“Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

Jesus wants you to know about the future, including specific events and very precise details. Our hope for the future rests upon revelation from Jesus about our eternal destiny. Jesus wants us to know that we, as believers, will always be with Him. We will not drift about the air, or linger around grave yards, or be undergo reincarnation. No, the New Testament presents a very clear picture that we will be with Jesus, and live in glorified bodies. Jesus will gather His children around Himself, and keep them there forever.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Jesus laid down the order of resurrection for believers. In the previous verse, we learned that every believer who died before the Rapture will have their bodies raised first. Then, in verse 17, we see that every believer alive when Jesus returns in the clouds will have their bodies resurrected. Jesus described resurrection in John 11:26 (Page 1678) as "he who believes in Me will live even if he dies." So after physical death, our bodies go into a grave. As believers, we go in spirit immediately to be with the Lord Jesus in Paradis. Later, at the Rapture, Jesus brings us with Him to the clouds of earth and resurrects our bodies. In the next instant, He raises the believers who are alive, and resurrects their bodies to be with Him too.

Notice that we rise to meet Jesus in the clouds. Many pictures in the Bible present Jesus returning to earth. In particular Zechariah 14:4 (Page

1492) tells us that Jesus will set foot upon the Mount of Olives. The Second Coming of Jesus refers then to the time Jesus returns to earth to reign and establish His earthly kingdom rule. He will then set up His millennial kingdom, after destroying all of His enemies. The details matter here. The Rapture of the church, described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 precedes the Second Coming of Jesus by seven years. His return to stand on the Mount of Olives ends the period of the great tribulation upon the earth, lasting a total of seven years. So, the Rapture pictures Christ coming in the clouds (but not touching the earth) to gather believers to Himself just before the seven year tribulation period begins. During those seven years, God pours His judgments of wrath and destruction upon an evil earth. At the end of the seven years of tribulation, Jesus comes back to earth and sets foot on the Mount of Olives.

The point that Jesus makes about the future is that we should be fully aware of what happens to believers when they depart at death from their physical bodies. Immediately at death, at the exact moment a believer dies, the believer goes home to be with the Lord Jesus. We gain hope and comfort regarding our loved ones who have died. We know that one day, at the Rapture, Jesus will come to the clouds of earth, and bring with Him all believers who have died before the Rapture. He will resurrect their bodies as the first thing He does at the Rapture. In the next instant, all the believers who are alive at the Rapture will be caught up to meet Him, and their bodies resurrected. We will travel with Jesus to heaven for the next seven years, and then return to earth with Jesus to reign with Him on earth. Because we know about our final and complete relationship with Jesus, we rest in Him for an eternity, because we will always be with Him.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we expect to be at home with Christ for an eternity, and have our physical bodies transformed and resurrected into glorified bodies.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we remind each other of being with Jesus forever, and the promise of glorified bodies. In this life our bodies decay and cause us**

pain, but one day we will be leaving them behind, and living forever with Jesus.

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do not hope to see Jesus and live with the certainty that one day we will be at home with Him, living in glorified bodies.**

Application for Today

Today, I will be meditating upon resurrection. Will I be alive when Jesus calls me to the clouds or will I be with Him returning to the clouds from heaven? Have you pondered your future today?

Day Fifty Six

Comforting One Another Today

1 Thessalonians 4:18

“Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”

When is the last time someone tried to comfort you? Many people have no one who cares enough about them to comfort them. When you last tried to comfort someone about death and dying, what did you tell them? For many people, they have no idea what to say and feel awkward just talking about the subject. Apparently, lots of people have never really given much thought to the command of Christ regarding comforting people about death and dying.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:18 Paul commanded us to comfort other believers with very specific instructions. I have heard believers say a lot of things about death and dying that stand absolutely contrary to the Bible. For example, how many times have you heard someone say that Joe or Mary is now in heaven, when you know that person adamantly refused to accept Jesus as Savior? If we believe the Bible, then we should use it as our guide. Jesus wanted each of us to rest in comfort regarding our eternal future with Him. Let me summarize the basics of how we comfort one another regarding death and dying.

First, we grieve for our loved ones who have died, but we do not grieve as those unbelievers who have no hope. We have the revelation of God that our believing friends are already spiritually at home with Jesus now, and will receive a glorified body when He returns with them in the clouds.

Second, we know that if we are alive and remain until the Rapture, then we will be caught up to the clouds to join Jesus there, with all the saints who have gone home before us. In that same twinkling of an eye, we will receive our glorified bodies by resurrection.

From these great promises and revelations of the future, we should all rejoice that we will be at home with the Lord for an eternity. We will not have a moment of separation from our Lord Jesus. Absent from the body means at home with the Lord. Furthermore, Jesus will return to the clouds to resurrect our bodies so that we will all have glorified bodies, like His. Those bodies will be imperishable, and immortal.

Our comfort comes directly from God. He cares for us and wants us to know about death and dying. We will always be with Jesus, forever and ever. Our bodies may decay and finally fail, but Jesus will resurrect us and we will be forever with Him. Even now, every saint who has died now lives with Jesus forever. Jesus said each of us has a ministry of comfort based upon His words. Notice that He commanded us to comfort one another. Now you know what to say and what passage to read to your grieving friends, who mourn the loss of their loved one in Christ.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we trust Jesus to provide comfort to our grieving friends.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we comfort our friends with the knowledge that we do not have to grieve like the Gentiles who have no hope; we know that our loved ones in Christ are with Him immediately after death, and we shall all receive new bodies at the Rapture.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fail to comfort our grieving and ignorant friends with the words of Jesus concerning the death of our loved one in Christ.**

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

Application for Today

Today, I want to comfort my friends with the words of Jesus regarding death and resurrection. What will you use to comfort grieving friends today?

14

Learning about the Day of the Lord Today

Jesus knows all things. He reveals things about the future that will encourage us to live for Him today. Jesus outlines the day of the Lord as a period of time in the future and it will come as a thief in the night. People will be saying peace and safety, but destruction will come upon them quickly.

As believers, Jesus teaches us about the future so that the day of the Lord will not overtake us a thief. We will live our daily lives ready to see Jesus at any moment. We will be alert and sober. We will live having put on the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation.

God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we encourage and build up one another with the knowledge of the future Jesus has revealed to us.

Day Fifty Seven

Times and Epochs Today

1 Thessalonians 5:1

“Now as to the times and epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written for you.”

The church at Thessalonica knew about the times and epochs of the future. Paul used the word "times" ("χρόνων") to describe the particular date or time when certain events would take place. The term "epochs" ("καιρών") refers to the quality or circumstances of a particular event, and so means what signs would be present (see Acts 3:19-20, Page 1704, for the same use of the same terms "times of refreshing" ("καιροί") and "period of restoration" ("χρόνων"); also compare Acts 1:7, Page 1699). Therefore, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they know not only about the course of events, but also the particular events that will come in the future.

Paul also referred to the Thessalonians as brethren. I always like the way Paul considered himself a believer with the Thessalonians, and he did not lord it over them. Just as the messenger Timothy had reported about the condition of Thessalonians, so also Paul acknowledged their understanding of the future, notwithstanding their ignorance about the specific events associated with the Rapture. Paul then focused upon both the sweep of the future, and certain special events in the future. In America today, many believers rarely read their Bible, and pay little attention to understanding the future as God revealed it the Bible. **Compared to most Americans, the Thessalonians were far advanced concerning their knowledge of the future.**

Paul said that the Thessalonians had "no need" for further instruction regarding the future times and epochs. Paul made applications in the next

verses about how we ought to live as believers in light of the knowledge we have about future. So often, we read the Bible, but fail to grasp how it impacts our lives. We do not see applications of how the prophetic aspects of the Bible influence our daily activities, like working, exercising, thinking, paying bills, and doing all the normal things we do. Furthermore, we rarely think about how the future should impact our present friendships and other relationships. But, you can count on Paul to bring out the connection about knowledge of the future and present living. In fact, Paul moved past his discussion of the Rapture, and wanted the Thessalonians to have a very good handle on the future. They did not need further information about "times" and "epochs," but rather they needed to know how to use their knowledge. Revelation from God should also impact our relationships with God and our neighbors.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we relate to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and recognize the knowledge of our friends.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we allow our knowledge of the future to impact how we live together today. The "times" and "epochs" of tomorrow directly impact what we do today, especially with our friends in Christ.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fail to recognize that some of friends in Christ already have plenty of knowledge about "times" and "epochs," but need further help in applying revelation to our lives today. Remember, Paul discussed the Rapture from the standpoint of comforting believers today.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to remember that some of my friends in Christ know about "times" and "epochs." I want to encourage them in their knowledge, and let that knowledge impacts our lives today. Will your knowledge of times and epochs influence your life today?

Day Fifty Eight

Like a Thief in the Night Today

1 Thessalonians 5:2

“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”

Thieves often try to come when you least expect it. They do not want you to get ready for them, and often look for unlocked and unattended valuables. Jesus taught His disciples to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, because He would come in an hour they do not expect. Throughout the New Testament, God emphasized the need to live ready to meet the Savior.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:2, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they already know about the "day of the Lord." The Old Testament prophets used this term "day of the Lord" to describe a period of time when Jesus would come to earth. In Acts 2:16-21 (Page 1701), Peter was preaching at Pentecost. He explained and applied the prophecy of Joel to the supernatural events taking place in Jerusalem after Jesus had ascended to heaven. During "the last days," a series of events will precede the coming of the "great and glorious day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20, Page 1701).

Paul taught that Jesus will come suddenly and unexpectedly. After focusing upon the details of the order of resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul then explained the manner of the coming of Christ. Because no one can predict the time of His coming, everyone should live expecting it at any moment. The Rapture will come like a thief in the night. So often today we hear about some preacher, prophet, or teacher setting the exact date that Jesus will come. Be sure to mark down that person as untrustworthy because they ignore the Bible, the Word of

God. Sure, they may claim some angel told them new revelation from God, but do not believe them. God wrote that we will not know when to expect the coming of Jesus, and it will be sudden. He will appear when no one expects Him. He intends that we live now as if He were coming right now.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we expect Jesus to come at any moment.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage each other to live today as if it were our last day on earth. Who would you share the Gospel with today if you knew the tribulation starts later today? Who would you contact to repair the friendship if you knew you were meeting Christ in the air later this hour?**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do not live today as if Christ were coming right now.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to live as if Jesus were coming right now. I want to expect Him today, and live with friends and neighbors all day as if it were my last day on earth. Are you expecting Jesus to come today?

Day Fifty Nine

Peace and Safety Today

1 Thessalonians 5:3

“While they were saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains and a woman with child, and they will not escape.”

Every word in the original autographs of the Bible is breathed by God, and is completely true and trustworthy. So often I hear Christians say that the Bible has errors, or contradictions, or does not really apply to today's situations because the culture back then was so different. Those Christians need to review what God said about the Bible being His divine revelation, and it will not pass away before all of it will be fulfilled (Matthew 5:18, Page 1507). So often, words in the text help us understand the complete revelation of God about a particular subject.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:3 God described people making their own prophecies about their own future, and the present state of affairs. Folks proclaim "peace and safety" because they do not know their own immediate future. I have a friend who never likes to hear anything negative. My friend disdains all sorts of bad news, and likes to think positive thoughts. A positive outlook on life, focused upon Jesus and His power in our lives is one thing. Focusing upon our own thoughts and hoping for the best is something else entirely.

Notice the connection between "peace and safety" and "sudden destruction." Only God knows what will happen next. Humans have been notorious for wishing one thing, but completely ignoring the facts staring them in the face. Especially in the spiritual realm people deceive

themselves every day. Instead of confronting their own sin with Godly repentance, they close their eyes and hope it will all turn out o.k. In this case, unbelievers will probably not be reading the Bible, so this passage primarily helps believers to understand the world around them. **In this passage God wants us to understand that His judgment of destruction will come upon unbelievers when they least expect it.**

Kindly observe that the destruction comes "suddenly." This term suddenly ("αἰφνίδιος") speaks to how quickly the problems erupt, like a trap springing suddenly (Luke 21:34, Page 1644). Your unbelieving friends around you will hear from all the news media that things are going well, peace and safety, but the real problems are just around the corner and they will come suddenly.

God described the coming problem as labor pains. Those pains will be intense, with real profound pain. You cannot ignore them, and your own attempts to get around them will not help. Many women say that labor pains can be sudden, and hurt more than any other pain.

Finally, God told us that unbelievers will not escape destruction and judgment from His hand. He intends to pour out upon the earth and its inhabitants His divine and perfect wrath for their sinful behavior. Unbelievers may run from God, but they cannot hide from His power or judgment upon them.

Stand back for a moment and ponder what Jesus told you here. People will be thinking peace and safety, but sudden, intense judgment will be just around the corner. Jesus particularly wants believers to know about the future, and these particular details count. They have not yet been fulfilled, and culture has nothing to do with His prophecies of the future. Jesus revealed the future to motivate us to live for Him in the present. Tomorrow, Lord willing, we will develop how this knowledge of sudden, intense judgment should influence our lives today.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we understand that unbelievers focus upon their own dreams of peace and safety while believers focus upon Jesus and His love.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we understand the connection between proclamations of "peace and safety" and sudden destruction coming upon unbelievers.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we start believing that peace and safety will come to this world without Jesus first bringing sudden destruction upon unbelievers.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage my friends to understand that proclamations of peace and safety really mean that sudden and intense destruction awaits the world of unbelievers. Are you ready for Jesus to start His program of sudden and intense destruction today?

Day Sixty

Not in Darkness Today

1 Thessalonians 5:4

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;”

I love to fish at Sebastian Inlet after dark, and, if it rains and blows, I often catch more fish. I remember, however, the first time my friend took me fishing at night down there. I stood on some rocks, and cast my lure into a black, still night. I could not see where my lure went, and I was completely uneasy fishing at night. Over time, with experience, you learn how to fish at night, how to wear a light on your head, and land fish in the dark. I even discovered how beautiful the ocean can be on a dark, stormy night, provided you are standing on land. One thing, I remember, however: always lock my car and hide all my valuables. Like the fish, thieves often come out at night, even in a nice state park.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:4 Paul had already described how the world will be proclaiming "Peace and safety!" when, in fact, tribulation awaits them right around the corner. In contrast, however, the believers at Thessalonica already knew that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. Paul reinforced that fact by letting them know they were not in darkness.

In Scripture, darkness often describes evil, and also spiritual ignorance (Luke 22:53, Page 1647; Ephesians 6:12, Page 1834; Acts 26:18, Page 1752). In the present verse, Paul knew the Thessalonians did not live in darkness, because Jesus has brought them into the light of salvation. In 1 John 1:5 (Page 1904), John revealed that "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." Furthermore, God said He has "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son"

(Colossians 1:13, Page 1841). Therefore, we know that all true believers continually live in the light of salvation, but sometimes they ignore the light and become blind in their conduct.

Paul linked spiritual darkness in this case with the coming of the thief. Because the Thessalonians had been rescued from the domain of darkness, they stood ready for the day of the Lord. **The day of the Lord will not come upon them like a thief in the night because they will be spiritually prepared, because they are spiritually alive.** As we will see, however, you may be spiritually alive, but still not ready for the day of the Lord, because you are asleep.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we know we are children of the light, and live accordingly.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we remind each other that every Christian has become a child of the light, and Jesus has overcome the darkness.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we stop living in the light of Jesus, and fail to remind our friends that the day of the Lord is coming.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to remind my friends in Christ that we live in the light of Jesus Christ and we are not in darkness. Are you living in darkness today? Have you fallen asleep today, even though you are still alive in Christ?

Day Sixty One

Sons of Light Today

1 Thessalonians 5:5

“for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;”

Yesterday, I talked about night fishing. Over time, I have learned how much fun it is to fish at night, but only if you have the right equipment. Without the right equipment, you generally cannot see how to tie on your lure, hook a live bait, cast your rod, retrieve your lure, or do so many other routine tasks that are a part of fishing. My eyes work o.k. in the daylight, because I was created to see in sunlight. The darker it gets, the less I see. Some creatures have shiny cells in the back of their eyes. Cats, dogs and other creatures appear to have eyes that sort of glow in different colors when you shine light in their eyes after dark. They were created to hunt and see at night, but not me. I need to pack a flashlight, spare batteries, and also spare lights in case one breaks or I lose it. So much of night fishing involves careful preparation. Because I know my limitations on seeing after dark, I have to get ready to fish after dark.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:5 Paul made a wonderful declaration about every person forgiven by faith in Jesus. Paul said they were all "sons of light and sons of day." Did you catch the way that God now sees you? Because God has "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13, Page 1841), we have become sons of light and sons of day. Paul emphasized what we are in Christ. In this case, Paul highlighted that we are sons of light, and sons of day, to make a spiritual point. By our very spiritual nature, we have become God's children, and remember that in God there is no darkness at all.

God loves to remind His children that who they are shapes what they do. **People act according to their spiritual nature.** Believers act like sons of light and sons of day because God abides in them. Likewise, unbelievers are not sons of light and sons of day, and evil dominates their lives. We need to keep in mind who we are so we will act like who we are in Christ.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we love each other in Christ as children of the light.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we live according the declarations of God in the Bible. In this case, we grow closer as friends in Christ when we stand upon God's declaration that we are children of the light and children of the day.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we ignore or forget the fact that each believer in Christ will always be a child of the light and a child of the day.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to remember that I and all my friends in Christ are children of the light and children of the day. God will always see us that way in Christ. Do you see yourself today as a child of the light and a child of the day? Will you encourage your friends in Christ to see themselves that way today?

Day Sixty Two

Alert and Sober Today

1 Thessalonians 5:6

“so then let us not sleep today as others do, but let us be alert and sober.”

For several years, I watched cardiac monitors at a hospital. I worked the night shift, from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. My basic job was to keep patients from dying from lethal heart rhythms. I had to know the difference between irregular heartbeats that meant nothing important, and those other beats that signaled death could come soon. I would notify the nurses who would go to the patient's room and check on the patient. Did I mention I had to watch up to thirty two monitors at a time? At times, I either got sleepy, or involved in one monitor, or started thinking about other things. Fortunately, I had computer back up with alarms. I noticed that the computer did not always catch all the bad heart rhythms, but it was nice to know it was watching also. In that job, I had to be sober and alert every night, and press a button on the computer monitor to record any unusual heart activity I saw. At any moment, I had to be ready to identify a lethal heart rhythm.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:6, Paul drew a conclusion with the words "so that." Often, God wants us to understand how certain facts must determine our behavior. For example, when we see a red traffic light, we stop the car. We understand the fact that the light is red. We then draw a conclusion that we must stop to be safe. **God teaches us facts in Scripture so that we might understand the commands of Scripture, and His will for our lives.** So many people do not read their Bible, and so have great ignorance about God's will for their lives. In this verse, God wants us to live according to His will, and He spells out that will for our lives.

Paul commanded that we should not sleep as others do. Paul did not mean, obviously, that we are never to close our eyes and rest from our labors. No, he meant that spiritually, we should not lose sight of the day of the Lord in the future, including the return of the Lord Jesus to this earth. As believers, we must not imitate the world. So often, Jesus warned the crowds to be ready for the appearing of the kingdom of God, and used the parable of the ten virgins. Only the prudent virgins were ready when the Bridegroom appeared. Jesus warned the people not to be drowsy and fall asleep. Likewise, Jesus reminds believers today to be ready for the day of the Lord, and Son of Man coming in glory.

God commands us to be sober ("γρηγορῶμεν") and alert ("νήφωμεν"). Paul used the term sober in the same way Jesus used the same term in Mark 13:34 (Page 1585). Jesus told the story of the man who took a journey, and put his slaves in charge of his house. Jesus warned that the slaves should not be asleep when the master returned, because he may return at evening, midnight, when the rooster crows, or in the morning. Paul also used the term alert. He meant that we should be spiritually alert to the coming of the day of the Lord. In 1 Peter 5:8 (Page 1899) Peter used this same root word to remind us to be alert so that we will be ready to face our adversary, the devil, who prowls around seeking someone to devour.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we live for Jesus every day, expecting Him to come to the clouds.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we remain sober and alert, never falling asleep spiritually. Sometimes, we need our friends to wake us up spiritually and stay awake.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we watch ourselves and our friends grow drowsy, and finally fall fast asleep spiritually. Together we can stay awake, ready for Christ to appear.**

Application for Today

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

Today, I want to be alert and sober, and keep my friends in Christ awake also. Are you awake, alert and sober today?

Day Sixty Three

Drunk and Asleep Today

1 Thessalonians 5:7

“For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.”

At the beach, I talk with men who have been drinking too much for many years. Several of my friends love to drink any kind of beer they can get their hands on, and others prefer stronger drinks, like vodka or whisky. They often like to drink for hours at a time, but they are homeless, or nearly homeless. Others of my friends hold down normal jobs, but they drink at night. They come home from work, and look forward to drinking enough so that they can "unwind" or "go to sleep." They rely upon getting enough alcohol into their system at night so that they can relax. I notice one thing about some of my friends who drink too much: they often look forward to drinking more on the weekends, especially at night. Friday night means drinking and then sleeping it off.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:7, Paul drew attention to the people who sleep and get drunk at night. Please recall that Paul has already made the point in this passage that the children of God by faith in Christ are all children of the light, and children of the day. The opposite of being alert and sober is to be asleep and drunk. When you read the word "For" starting a sentence in Pauline literature, you may often expect that Paul is linking together two verses, and often expanding upon the previous verse. Paul follows that pattern here. Paul expands upon the "others" mentioned in verse 6, and explains that the others sleep and get drunk. We know that believers must be alert and sober, expecting the day of the Lord and return of Christ to the clouds.

Paul highlighted three characteristics of the "others" that every believer must avoid. First, every believer must avoid being spiritually asleep, especially at night. Because we are children of light and children of day, the night should never overtake us so that we are asleep spiritually, and not actively waiting for Christ. Second, every believer must avoid being drunk, especially at night. Being drunk means that you have lost control of yourself, and alcohol now controls you. God's children, as children of the day, must never allow themselves to put anyone in control of their lives, except God. At night, people tend to get drunk more, and think because the sun has passed over the yardarm, then it is o.k. to get drunk. Yet, we know as believers that getting drunk at night only leads to being unprepared to meet Jesus. Third, every believer must avoid a "night" lifestyle. We are not children of the night, but God has delivered us into the kingdom of light. By nature, we have become in Christ children of light. **We live the life of Christ, and He was never asleep when it counted, and never drunk in His entire life.** Please keep in mind that Paul primarily has in mind the contrast between spiritually prepared to meet Christ right now, and others who are not prepared to meet Christ at any time. He uses the symbolism of drinking and sleeping and night to contrast the spiritual states of being alert, sober and light.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we avoid sleeping and getting drunk at night.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we wake up our friends, and remind them to avoid getting drunk, because we are children of the light, and Christ commands us to be alert and sober.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we let our friends act like children of the night. They no longer care about the coming of Jesus, and we no longer care about them.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to be avoid being asleep or drunk at night. Are you living a "night" lifestyle today? Ready to wake up a believing friend today?

Day Sixty Four

Of the Day Today

1 Thessalonians 5:8

“But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”

Paul loved to describe the Christian life in terms of symbols. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul used the symbolism of armor worn by a soldier. Paul spent time under arrest, and he must have encountered many soldiers during his lifetime traveling through the world. Paul apparently also pondered the reasons soldiers wear their armor. **Stressing that every believer must remain sober and alert, because the day of the Lord may come at any time, Paul then described how we prepare ourselves for daily life, using a soldier's armor.** He used this same concept of armor in Romans 13:12 (Page 1777, "armor of light") and a more extensive passage in Ephesians 6:10-17 (Page 1834).

Paul tied the command to be "sober" with having put on the armor. You make the choice daily to live a sober life, and part of that sobriety is to put on your armor. The entire image of a soldier wearing armor brings to mind the picture of combat, and being ready to defend yourself.

Paul first spoke of the breastplate of faith and love. When you think about faith, it allows us to guard our spiritual hearts as a breastplate guards our physical hearts from flaming arrows, or the piercing blows of the enemy. But think further about the breastplate of love. Paul used this image of a defensive breastplate as a symbol of love. As believers, Christ overcomes the world and has conquered all spiritual foes. Yet, He has not

yet subjected all things to His rule. By His love, we protect ourselves from the onslaught of the enemy and attacks of the world.

Paul also referred to the helmet of salvation. God designed our skulls to be made of bone, that protects our brains from blows. We can be very grateful for thick skulls, because it takes a fairly strong blow to the head to cause severe injury, although some light blows under the right circumstances may cause problems. Therefore, we appreciate the need for a helmet. In this case, Paul again emphasized the need for our daily sobriety to be linked to our salvation. Salvation only comes by faith that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. He bore my sins in His body on the cross, so that I may live forever in His righteousness. The helmet of salvation reminds me constantly that God has saved me already and eternally from every attack in the spiritual realm against my head and my life. In the physical realm, I wear it every day to remind me of the constant protection of God to keep me saved from the penalty of my sins. It also reminds me of the day when Jesus will wear the clothing of vengeance and execute vengeance against the devil and all evil in the day of vengeance (Isaiah 61:17-20, Page 1164; Isaiah 61:1, Page 1167; Luke 4:17-20, Page 1602).

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we live sober lives, expecting the day of the Lord at any time.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we put on the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of salvation.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we let our friends in Christ live without armor, and suffer the spiritual consequences.**

Application for Today

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

Today, I want to wear my breastplate of love and faith, and feel the helmet of salvation protecting me. Will you feel the weight of God's armor today? Will you encourage other believers to wear the armor today?

Day Sixty Five

Not Destined for Us for Wrath Today

1 Thessalonians 5:9

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I talk with homeless men at the beach almost every day. One man I met told me that he planned on going to hell, and he could not change his destiny. He thought of himself as a good man, who helped others often. He said he did not have much himself, but he got along with his friends and did the best he could in life. Everything about this man personifies the spiritual blindness that so many unbelievers use to view the future. As believers, we must understand our destiny in Christ and how it must influence our daily life. Jesus as Savior offers salvation to all men, and does not wish for anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance.

Every unbeliever lives under the wrath of God and the judgment of God. Believers have the assurance that God does not pour His wrath out upon them, because we have salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Paul has just finished detailing how wrath will come upon the world for their unbelief. While they proclaim "Peace and Safety," destruction will come suddenly upon them (1 Thessalonians 5:3, Page 1850).

Notice the words "God destined." This word destined ("ἔθετο") means a deliberate act of God, with the idea of placing, setting, or positioning something. In this case, God positions us for salvation, not wrath. The verb emphasized that God does it Himself, and the work has been completed already. In other words, God has already fixed your

destiny, and it is to obtain salvation when everyone else suffers from His wrath. Each person will go to one of two destinies: (1) the wrath of God for eternity; or (2) deliverance from the wrath of God by receiving forgiveness from Jesus Christ, resulting in eternal life and eternal salvation.

When you become concerned that no one looks after your personal welfare, think again. **God has fixed your life by His power.** He keeps you in the palm of His hand and knows how everything will turn out. While the earth suffers wrath at the day of the Lord, you will be obtaining the salvation you have longed for. The Lord Jesus Christ will exercise His full regal authority to save you from destruction, and keep you in His love forever.

As a passing note, one of the reasons we hope in the coming of Christ to the clouds centers upon this verse. God has not determined that His Church should go through the tribulation period, when God pours out His wrath upon the earth. Instead, God gathers believers in Christ to Himself first, and then then He begins the earnest judgment of the earth for its unbelief and other evil actions. But for the church, he destined us for obtaining salvation. What a great blessing for us.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we live according to our destiny of salvation.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage our friends in Christ to realize our unbelieving friends and families are destined for wrath and so we should speak to them now.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we live in denial of our destiny in Christ: salvation and deliverance from wrath.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to remember my destiny, and the destiny of all my friends in Christ. Together, we will escape God's wrath and enjoy His salvation for eternity. God has destined each man to eternal salvation or eternal wrath. I want to live before my friends according to the destiny of salvation, showing everyone the long-ball picture of life and hope. Will your destiny influence your actions in Christ today?

Day Sixty Six

Together with Jesus Today

1 Thessalonians 5:10

“Who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.”

I often go to bed much later than my wife, and I love to read books in bed. I often have four or five books on my bed. Sometimes, my wife gets in bed with me after I have fallen asleep. I love to feel her presence beside me. We have been married over 30 years, and I still love being with her every day. I like being with her, talking with her, eating with her, and hanging out with her. She no longer works full time because of her illnesses, but it just means I get to see more of her. I truly enjoy living with her.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Jesus wants us to know that we will live with Him forever. You see that word “forever.” It means everything to me. I will live with my Savior without end. Nothing will ever separate me from Him and His love. Not even physical death will separate me from the love and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please notice the word asleep. As we have seen previously regarding 1 Thessalonians 4:13, sleep in this passage means the death of our physical bodies. It does not mean that we are separated from Christ. Spiritually, we continue to live with Christ. When Christ comes to the clouds to resurrect the bodies of believers, we know that Christ will bring with Him those believers who have fallen asleep. Therefore, they are alive with Him spiritually from the time their physical bodies die. At the Rapture, they will receive a resurrected body, and continue to live with Christ for eternity.

I always love the basic theology of salvation. Christ died for us, so that we might live with Him forever. He took my sins in His body on the cross, so that I may die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds we were healed. He now lives in resurrected glory with all the children adopted into His family by faith. **Not only do we escape the wrath to come, but we also live with Jesus forever.** From the moment I asked Jesus to forgive my sins because He died for me, and I believed that He heard me and forgave me, I have had eternal life. I will live with Jesus forever.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we know that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Jesus for eternity.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we share with each other how wonderful it is to know the unending, eternal love of Jesus Christ, and to recall that He died so that we will live with Him forever.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship in Christ when we imagine that anything can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ, or treat someone as if Jesus no longer loved them.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to live another day of eternity with Jesus my Friend and Savior. He died so that I may live with Him forever. How many people can I encourage with that truth today?

Day Sixty Seven

Encourage and Build Up Today

1 Thessalonians 5:11

“Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”

As a lawyer, I often deal with people who are in a terrible legal struggle that threatens their entire business life, and sometimes their whole way of life. During the Great Recession of 2008 and following, I have seen family businesses close after forty years in the same location, and new, promising business fail for lack of financing. I also see people devastated by cancer, heart problems, and strokes face financial turmoil. I try to care for my clients as friends. Not only do I enjoy praying with them, but I also send them e-mails from time to time designed to encourage them keep up their trust in the Lord Jesus. You see, going through legal troubles often mimics life, because you simply must trust God to help you through the struggles, and also to enjoy the good times. We need encouragement every day and we need our friends to build us up every day. **We also need to be people who build up and encourage our friends, every day.**

In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul began his thought with the word "Therefore." I was taught in legal writing classes that the term "therefore" meant that we were using logical arguments and drawing conclusions. In this verse, Paul drew a conclusion based upon the supernatural revelation from God concerning our future of being with Christ forever, whether we are asleep or awake. Because of God's love for us, we will always be with Jesus. Based upon that revelation of the future from God, and His eternal love for us, we should be using the revealed truths from God to encourage and build up saints. Instead of saying "Have a nice day!", we might say to our friends: "We live together with Jesus forever." Or we might say, "We do

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

not grieve as those who have no hope, but know that our loved ones will be present with the Lord, even if they die today."

Paul also instructed us that we need this encouragement all the time. The Christian life means that we are always looking to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. We use our spiritual gifts for the building up and the growth of the body of Christ in love. In all ways, in action and speech, we need Christ within us to spread His loving encouragement to every believer around us. Tell your friends how much you need and appreciate their encouragement in Christ.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we build up and encourage one another in Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when keep on encouraging one another and building up one another.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship in Christ when we stop encouraging one another and start tearing down one another.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage my friends in Christ and build them up using my spiritual gifts. What will you do to encourage your Christian friends to encourage you today?

15

Learning To Honor Friends Today

As believers, God has sent to people to labor diligently among us for the sake of Jesus. You may not always agree with them, but you can always count upon them to keep on working and helping believers to walk with Christ. Sometimes they stumble badly, but in love their friends seek Jesus to restore them so that they may continue to labor diligently.

Some believers also have charge over other believers in the Lord. The office of elder in the New Testament described men who had oversight of the church. They were to protect the sheep from wolves without and to keep unbelievers from leading believers out of the flock through their perversions.

Paul urged the Thessalonians to appreciate every believer who labored diligently among them. Obviously Paul knew the ministry team of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had the appreciation of the Thessalonians, but others had taken up the mantle of oversight and teaching in Paul's absence. Paul wanted to be sure that all those who labor diligently, as overseers and teachers, received the encouragement and honor they deserve.

Be careful here. Do not let your spiritual appreciation turn into idolatry of any kind toward the spiritual leaders in the church. As I have mentioned elsewhere (the Pastoral Heresy--<http://christassembly.org/the-pastoral-heresy/>), be very careful to avoid using titles like "Rabbi," "Pastor," "Teacher," "Father," "Apostle," or any other title to describe any believer. Jesus alone is the Teacher and God the Father is your only Father (Matthew 23:6-12, Page 1542). We follow only one Leader, and His name is Jesus. We are all anointed of the Holy Spirit, and all of us have spiritual gifts to do the work of ministry. God never intended for any man to lead the church. He reserved that role solely for Himself, and appointed a group of elders in every local assembly to shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight, without lording it over the people allotted to their charge.

Day Sixty Eight

Appreciate Those Who Diligently Labor Today

1 Thessalonians 5:12

“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.”

I hear about Pastor-led churches today, and every time I cringe a little inside. The New Testament never describes a single person as the leader of any local assembly, except the Person of Jesus Christ, Who alone is the Head of the Church. **People so often confuse the spiritual gift of "pastor" with the church office of Elder recognized in the New Testament.** Let me highlight the distinctions between the two. A pastor may not necessarily hold the office of an elder and an elder may not have the spiritual gift of pastor.

In Ephesians 4:11-12 (Pages 1830-1831) God described various spiritual gifts He has given to the church, one of which is pastor (the Granville Sharp Rule does not apply to plural nouns—so it is not Pastor-Teacher, meaning the same person with two gifts). These people use their spiritual gift of pastor for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. Notice the saints, not pastors, do the work of service in the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts come in many varieties with a variety of ministries. A spiritual gift of administration ("κυβερνήσεις"--1 Corinthians 12:28, Page 1797) or leadership ("προϊστάμενος"--Romans 12:8, Page 1775) stands separately from the gift of pastor (1 Corinthians 12:28, Page 1797). Therefore, God uses spiritual

gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. The elders of the church have very specific functions described in the New Testament, and they have the spiritual oversight in the church.

In 1 Timothy 5:17 (Page 1858) we read about the office of elders ("πρεσβύτεροι"). Elders are subject to appointment by men (Titus 1:5, Page 1865), whereas spiritual gifts are always given by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1, Page 1796). Elders shepherd the church of God as overseers ("ἐπισκόπους"). The elders have their own spiritual qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Page 1856; Titus 1:5-9, Pages 1865-1866), that assist in their identification for selection as elders. Please take notice that all elders rule the church as overseers and do the work of an under-shepherd of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Timothy 5:17, Page 1858; 1 Peter 5:1-4, Page 1989), but not all elders preach and teach the word, because not all elders are given the spiritual gifts for teaching and preaching. Instead, one of the qualifications of an elder requires him to be able to teach the Word of God (1 Timothy 3:2, Page 1856). While every elder has the capacity to teach the Word of God, not every elder has the spiritual gift of teaching.

Therefore, when we come to a passage like 1 Thessalonians 5:12, we understand that the people who have charge over ("προϊσταμένους") us in the Lord are the elders, and they give instruction. Sometimes a pastor may be an elder, but God does not call all elders to preach and teach the word, for those are separate spiritual gifts distinct from the office of elder (1 Timothy 5:17, Page 1858). Those elders who do preach and teach the Word of God diligently should be appreciated ("εἰδέναι") by all believers. The term "appreciate" also carries with it the idea of learn, know, and understand. We should be aware and grateful for the work of elders who labor among us.

Let me also take a moment and focus upon the last phrase of the verse. The word for instruct ("νουθετοῦντας ") means to admonish, teach, or confront. Later in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, this same root word will be translated "admonish," and it should call to our mind this work of elders, who lead the church in many ways, one of which involves keeping the church walking together in harmony in the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:25, Page 1826--"στοιχῶμεν").

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when appreciate believers who labor diligently in Christ to build us up and have charge over us.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when live in harmony with everyone, especially the spiritual leaders who have charge over us, and teach us to walk with Christ, and confront us when necessary.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship in Christ when we no longer respect and appreciate those who serve Christ by leading the church.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to appreciate the spiritual leaders I know who work diligently for Christ. I want them to know I appreciate their hard work. Whom will you appreciate today?

Day Sixty Nine

Love and Peace Today

1 Thessalonians 5:13

“and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in patience for one another.”

In America, people esteem sports heroes, music stars, television personalities, radio talk show hosts, and many other types of people. They often show their pleasure by buying products those stars endorse. People often look up to other people, with esteem in their eyes.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:13, Paul continued the revelation of appreciation for the local servants of Christ, the elders of the church. Speaking under the spiritual influence of God, Paul commanded us to esteem ("ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ") them. This term for esteem means the highest form of comparison: surpassingly, extremely, immeasurably more (Ephesians 3:20, Page 1830). In this case, when you think about loving people in the local assembly, you must love your elders extremely and surpassingly.

The disciples of Jesus spent time arguing among themselves who was the greatest disciple. In Luke 9:46-48 (Page 1617) Jesus, knowing what they were each thinking about his own greatness, placed a child before them. He then told them that "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is the least among all of you, this is the one who is great." Notice that Jesus emphasized being least to be great, and receiving children in His name. We love elders not for their office, but because we recognize true elders who do the works of Christ. Because of their work, we love them extremely.

Paul also linked this idea of extreme love with patience ("ἐιρηνεύετε"). This word derives from the common root word for peace in the New Testament, and also links back to the Hebrew idea of peace ("shalom") in the Old Testament. As we live together in love in the local assembly, we must also take steps to live in peace with one another. In 2 Corinthians 13:11 (Page 1819) Paul wrote: "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace with be with you." For some of the believers, it is time for you to make peace with other believers today, but you must learn to do so in Christ.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we esteem our elders highly in love and live in peace with one another.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when stop hating elders, but start loving them. Jesus commands us to live in peace with each other, and His love and peace will prevail.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we no longer love elders who work for Christ, and when we no longer make it a point to live in peace with fellow believers in the local assembly.**

Application for Today

Today, I will esteem elders who work for Christ diligently in the local assembly. I will live in peace with my fellow believers. Whom will you let know today that you love them with the surpassingly perfect love of Christ for their good work?

16

Learning Patience with Friends Today

We all need patience. We need to receive patience and to show patience. In Christ, all believers must learn when to be patient with other believers and when to take action while still showing patience. We must never mistake patience for accepting sinful behavior. We must never do anything to promote sinful behavior in other people.

Patience requires the power of God in your life. Patience must be learned and mastered over time. It comes in different flavors and looks different in different people. Some people will need you to show them patience in one way, while you must be patient with other people in a different way. For example, every alcoholic needs patience, but your patience must never promote drinking in the alcoholic. Jesus demonstrated great patience with the Pharisees as a group, but He showed a different patience with Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus.

Paul revealed how we must be very careful to distinguish the unruly, the fainthearted and the weak. Each of those different people require different forms of encouragement from other believers. If we do not listen carefully to our friends with discernment gleaned from the revelation of God in the Bible, we will not know how to build strong bonds of friendship. At times, we will all be unruly, fainthearted and weak. Understanding the differences between the unruly, fainthearted, and weak can make a big difference in our lives. With everyone, we must be patient always.

Day Seventy Five

Patient with Everyone Today

1 Thessalonians 5:14

“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”

I often pray that the Lord Jesus would help me understand how to love different people. Not everyone needs the same actions from me. I know that God commands me to love everyone, but I also know that God tailors His wonderful love just for me. He provides me with things that I need, and helps me in a variety of ways. In one sense, love from God always fits me just perfectly. God loves you too, in just the perfect way.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul issued one command that controls four other commands. The controlling command comes from the word "urge." This simple command applies to the entire assembly at Thessalonica. The whole assembly at Thessalonica will have the pleasure of watching God work among the believers as they minister to one another. Now let us look at what the assembly should be doing for one another. Each need requires a different form of love from God. As believers, we must follow the urging of God to help our friends in Christ, and then discern the needs, and apply the commands to each different need. **We must act in tailored love.**

First, you must admonish the unruly believers. This term admonish ("νουθετεῖτε") means also to warn and exhort. It carries with it the idea of personal confrontation. So often believers see behavior that conflicts with the commandments of Scripture. We are not talking about personal preferences here, but the unruly ("ἀτάκτους") behavior directly conflicts

with the commands of Christ for living. For example, a believer you know is living in immorality. You must confront that believer because Jesus told us not to live in immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18, Page 1788). Admonish here means that you read the Bible to the unruly person, and invite them to repent and change their behavior, starting with seeking forgiveness from God, and then living in harmony with God and His Word.

Second, encourage the fainthearted. I love the whole idea of encouragement. In this case, you are to encourage the fainthearted. The term encourage ("παράμυθεῖσθε") means to call alongside, and then speak in a friendly manner, for the purpose of calling up and strengthening. In this case, you speak words of hope from the Word of God to the fainthearted. This term fainthearted ("ὀλιγοψύχους") literally means little soul. In my mind, some people have shrunk down in size and feel small. They have lost the sense of strength for living in Christ. In the spiritual realm, pressures or problems have pushed them down and they feel very small inside. You, through God's love, can call them up, or better yet, visit that believer and let them know that God remains stronger and more powerful than anything facing them, no matter how grim life may be from the human perspective.

Third, help the weak. So many people I know have weakness of one type or another. This term for weak ("ἀσθενῶν") refers to the physically sick (John 11:1, Page 1767), the spiritually helpless (Romans 5:6, Page 1764), and the weak in faith (Romans 14:2, Page 1777). Therefore, we must be sensitive to the needs of the weak who need to be touched with the strength of Jesus Christ. I often hold the hand of people in bed with physical sickness, or give a hug to someone weak spiritually.

Fourth, be patient with everyone. While the previous commands pertained to specific groups, this last command covers everyone. Every believer needs to show patience, and receive patience. Because we all sin, we all need patience. Because we all have our own preferences and patterns, we need patience from others. All the commands in this passage require patience in their practice.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we understand that different people have different needs for loving attention.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with everyone.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do not recognize the needs in our friend's lives, or imagine that all our friends in Christ need all the same things all the time.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to encourage my friends to recognize the needs of their believing friends. Why not allow God to use you to minister to those needs: admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Will you look at your friends today through the loving eyes of Jesus and His word?

17

Learning To Help Friends

Remain Friends Today

Believers quarrel with one another about many things. Often, they quarrel over their own desires and pleasures. Once the quarrel breaks out, then it may quickly escalate to white hot words, followed by stormy silence full of tension.

In some cases, evil behavior rips believers apart from one another. Never forget that your friends need your friendship most at times when they live in evil. When they move away following evil, be sure to act righteously towards them.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonian believers to act independently of how other believers treat you. For example, when another believer acts with evil towards you, do not respond with evil. Consider the devil's schemes. He can spread evil throughout a local assembly if he can cause a ripple effect of evil behavior starting with one person repaying another person with evil behavior. You hurt me so I will hurt you. Simple retaliation does not achieve the righteousness of God, especially when done in human anger.

Paul revealed that your friends need you to seek after that which is good for them at all times. You may recall in the previous verse Paul taught us how to discern the different needs of our friends. We must respond to them according to their individual need of the moment. Paul also mentioned that we must act for the welfare of each person and the entire community. Although the needs of the individual believer may diverge from the needs of the group, God will always provide a wonderful way to love every believer, as we follow His guiding love. We remain friends when we do not repay evil with evil. We remain friends when we always seek the good for each believer and for all believers.

Day Seventy Six

Good For One Another Today

1 Thessalonians 5:15

“See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.”

I finished reading a novel about the Old West in America. A single woman had to defend her home and large ranch against evil men who wanted to take it away from her. Some of her relatives, and eventually her sons, returned to the ranch and they were tough men. They repaid evil with violence. They did not start a fight, but they sure tried to end it with fists or guns. In many ways, this tough pioneer spirit makes many people stand up, oppose evil and enforce righteousness. Yet, according to Jesus, believers in Him should be very careful about how we treat our friends in Christ, and all other people.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:15, Paul issued a stern warning against retaliation, and repaying evil with evil. So often, we think first of retaliation, and we burn with anger when people visit unprovoked evil upon us. All of our natural instincts come out, and we want to get at least even, and maybe prove that we are not people to be messed with. Paul, however, cautioned us that such evil repaying evil will only lead to a cycle of evil.

In Matthew 5:38 (Page 1508) Jesus said that we are no longer to live under the law of an "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Instead, Jesus taught us not to resist an evil person; whoever slaps you on one cheek, turn the other to him also. Jesus imposed a much higher standard here by commanding His servants to love your neighbor and your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

Take a moment and ponder the whole concept of evil. In 1 Thessalonians 5:15, we must know first that some believers will do evil to their fellow believers. You can count on it. Your friend in Christ will do something completely evil to you. You may not have started the fight, but the temptation for you to repay with evil flares up within you. Stop. Remember what Jesus said and Paul reiterated. When we face evil, even from our friends in Christ, we never repay evil with evil, even though our first instinct says get them back, double if possible. Jesus never did anything evil in His entire life. We must be like Him all the time.

Following Jesus not only means we avoid doing evil, but we have an affirmative obligation to do good as well. The term good ("ἀγαθόν") speaks of the tree that bears good fruit (Matthew 7:17, Page 1511), the good that only God possesses (Mark 10:18, Page 1577), and the good man who brings forth good treasure from his heart (Luke 6:45, Page 1608). We have a duty as believers to counter evil with doing good, because we love Jesus and act like Him. Love means we never repay evil with evil, but we lay down our lives to do good, just as Jesus did.

For some of you reading this page, you know you have repaid evil for evil. Now is the time that you repent, call the person you have done evil to, and set the matter right. Determine from here on out to do good, and make your love in Christ known to your friends.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we never repay evil with evil, but do good to everyone.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when overcome the evil desire to repay evil with evil, but always do good for our friends in Christ, even they do evil to us. As friends, we stop our friends from repaying evil with evil, but encourage them to repay evil with good.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we let evil rule our lives and destroy our friendships. We build and encourage**

one another with good, especially when it meets evil head on.

Application for Today

Today, I will do good, and avoid paying evil with evil. The love of Jesus Christ will overcome all evil, and we want to follow Him, doing good. Will you repay evil or do good today?

18

Learning To Obey Basic Spiritual Commands Today

God loves for us to obey Him. He commands us so that our lives will prosper under His control. Jesus spoke of taking His yoke upon us, because He is gentle and humble in heart. Notice how the command to be yoked links directly to “gentle” and “humble in heart.” Jesus commands us to learn from Him. He promised rest for our weary souls and heavy laden lives.

Paul revealed a series of short commands to conclude his letter to the Thessalonians. People tend to remember better the first and last things they heard. In this case, God intends for us to remember and study everything God revealed through Paul. In other words, every word of 1 Thessalonians deserves our faithful study, and application in our lives. As we review this series of commands, we will learn that those basic spiritual commands build upon one another, and provide a strong foundation for living as friends in Christ Jesus.

Day Seventy Seven

Rejoice Always Today

1 Thessalonians 5:16

“Rejoice always.”

Some very small verses carry really huge messages. In light of all Paul has taught and preached in 1 Thessalonians, he wound up the book with a series of commands. He started the last series in 1 Thessalonians 5:14: "Rejoice always." If you like to memorize verses, here is a great, short verse.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Paul commanded us to rejoice ("χαίρετε"). So often I meet people who think they cannot have any command over their emotions. Some believers I know live under the tyranny of their emotions. Frequently people live under such a volcano of sinful anger that deep layers of the ashes of anger lay upon their lives, with very toxic effect. It tends to choke off joy, and makes you unpleasant to be around. It often stems from evil festering in your heart. Paul has great news for you!

God demands that He alone control your emotions. Can you imagine that God demands that you rejoice today? Let me say that again. God demands that you rejoice today. Consider for a moment Hebrews 12:2, Page 1884: "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith, who for the joy ["χαρᾶς"] set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus had joy, even as He looked forward to the cross. He had real human emotions, completely controlled by God. Can you imagine how often you let your emotions go? We sin so often when we no longer let God control our emotional lives. So many people never even consider that God demands to

be in full control of how we feel every day. He said rejoice always. We never have an excuse to give up our joy. **Your friends in Christ all around you need someone to rejoice over God's activity in their life, especially when they do not see it for themselves.** Do you feel His love today? Why not rejoice in His love? Have you seen His kindness and grace? Why not rejoice in His kindness and grace today? You get the idea. We may have some tears on our face at times, but we still must find time every day to rejoice in our hearts over all that God has done and will continue to do. Consider how Paul taught us how to grieve over the death of our loved ones. We may shed tears for the loss, but we rejoice over the knowledge that our believing friends immediately went to be with Jesus and will be coming back to the clouds with Him. We shall all be together in Christ for eternity.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we God takes control of how I feel towards my friends and how I feel about God.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when I rejoice over the friends in Christ God has given me. All my friends need to see rejoicing in me today.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we let our emotions hurt our friends without cause. When God controls our lives, we feel His emotions and rejoice over the truth, focus upon the joy set before us, and share the joy of Jesus Christ with our friends.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to rejoice in Christ and encourage my friends with joy. Will you rejoice with your friends today?

Day Seventy Eight

Pray without Ceasing Today

1 Thessalonians 5:17

“Pray without ceasing;”

One of my friends told me: "I pray twice a day. When I wake up, and when I go to sleep." I rejoice that my friend prays. I also recall a missionary who came home from Africa after twenty plus years. He said one day he got all the way to noon before he prayed. He felt ashamed and astonished. Prayer reflects your fellowship with God, as you see it.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul focused upon just one aspect of prayer: frequency. Well, how often should we pray? God leaves no doubt: all the time. You must be kidding. No. The Bible right here records the command that we must pray all the time. Every day, all day. Every night, well, as long as you are awake. Are you getting the point here? We must pray all the time. Our entire life should be with a view of prayer, as if we were praying all the time. We should be in constant prayer-fellowship with God. We continuously stay in touch with God, consciously, during the day. We take every thought and every emotion to God.

Now, let us go back to the previous verse: God commanded us to rejoice always. Then God commanded us to pray without ceasing. **From God's perspective, our prayers should be filled with rejoicing and our rejoicing should be filled with prayer.** The two concepts go hand in hand. You want more prayer, rejoice more. You want more rejoicing, pray more.

O.k., realistically, how do you pray without ceasing? Go back to the basics of prayer. You do not have to repeat any prayer over and over again. In fact, the New Testament has many prayers, and they generally indicate that prayer means that we express to God our failures, triumphs, sins, petitions, praise, thanksgiving, worship, emotions, hopes, and plans--in short, everything in our lives. When you understand that prayer means that you will be talking continuously with God about everything that comes up, you will suddenly understand how to pray better. Everything you feel, everything you plan, everything you want to do, everything you do not want to do, everything you need God's help with--all those things require prayer.

I often hear people say they do not have enough things to pray about so that they could pray without ceasing. Go back and think about the previous paragraph. If you get into the habit of praying about everything you are thinking, and what to think or do next, or what to feel next, and on and on, then Jesus will become more and more the center of your life. Practice will help. Count upon the Holy Spirit moving you to pray just as you should and when you should.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we pray without ceasing.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when I pray for friends, and we each encourage each other to pray without ceasing.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we stop praying for each other and ourselves. When we no longer care about prayer, we can be sure that God always listens to His children with a heart tuned to love.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to rejoice in Christ and pray without ceasing. Will you pray without ceasing today and encourage your friends to do the same?

Day Seventy Nine

In Everything Give Thanks Today

1 Thessalonians 5:18

“in everything give thanks today; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

When you sit down and give some serious thought to what the architecture of your mind should look like, most people realize they never really give much thought to a floor plan. They just build their life, adding on a little space here, and then remodeling the space there, and moving furniture around over in that room, and maybe repainting here and there. Our minds can become very cluttered, messy, and weird. Our weird minds can have dramatic impacts upon how we interact with our friends, family, and everyone else. Giving thanks should be a basic part of the architecture of our lives. Giving thanks today will provide a new perspective on the lives we are building and remodeling.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Paul added to his list of commands God has for us. **He now commands us to give thanks in everything, because giving thanks in everything is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.** We have a lot to talk about in this verse, and so let me take it in sections.

First, giving thanks in everything fits with all the commands already laid down in this passage, particularly rejoice always and pray without ceasing. Now Paul added the third command: in everything, give thanks today. Paul emphasized "in everything." No matter what is going on in your life today, give thanks. Right in the middle of the heartache, triumph, failure, or whatever--give thanks right in the middle of it. Do you give thanks every day? I love to ask people: "What is the best thing Jesus has

done for you lately?" I know the greatest thing Jesus does for anyone is always salvation. He bore my sins in His body on the cross so that I may die to sin and live to righteous--all by faith alone. Paul really meant in everything we must give thanks. Want a new perspective on prayer? Give thanks every time you pray and for the things happening in your life--good, bad or indifferent.

Second, notice the word "today." We give thanks today for everything that happened today. In other words, before the day ends, be sure that you have given thanks for everything God has done for you today. He is quite explicit here. Give thanks not only in everything, but do it today. Before you close your eyes, make an inventory of all the good things God has done for your today. Take the time to give Him thanks from the bottom of your heart.

Third, the will of God for me in Christ Jesus means that I give thanks in everything today. Notice the part about "the will of God for me in Christ Jesus." If you are serious about being a follower of Christ, then do the things that He said to do. It is just that simple in many ways. Doing His will remains different from talking about doing His will. If you want to know God's will, so that you can do God's will, then give thanks today in everything.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we give thanks today right in the middle of everything that is going on today.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when I give thanks knowing that God wills me to give thanks today. I should be encouraging my friends to give thanks with me today, no matter how I feel today, or what happened today. You see, the habit of giving thanks in every circumstance of life, will carry us through the really difficult days, and also help us rejoice during the great days. In fact, it will lift all our days closer to Jesus.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we fail to give thanks today, or we let any circumstance in our life stop us from giving thanks today. We need to thank God for our friends in Christ today, no matter what they are like today.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to give thanks in everything. Before you close your eyes today, will you be sure to thank God for all He has done for you today? The only way to do that will be to thank Him all day long for all He does, as He does it in your life. Praying yet?

Day Eighty

Do Not Quench the Spirit Today

1 Thessalonians 5:19

“Do not quench the Holy Spirit;”

One God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. For the Christian, we serve one triune God, and strive by His power to love God with all of our heart, strength and mind. Many Christians know very little about the Trinity, and do not know many verses about the Holy Spirit. In the list of short commands that close 1 Thessalonians, Paul directed our attention to the Holy Spirit. He is a divine Person, separate and distinct from the Person of God the Father, and separate and distinct from the Person of God the Son. Yet, He is a part of the Godhead, and one with the Father and the Son. He shares the same attributes with the Father and the Son: He knows everything, He has all power, He has always been present everywhere, and He never changes. The Holy Spirit can be grieved, showing He has emotions (Ephesians 4:30, Page 1831), and can be lied to (Acts 5:3, Page 1707). The Holy Spirit produces His fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23, Page 1825), and God commands us to walk in the Holy Spirit as believers (Galatians 5:16, Page 1825; Galatians 5:25, Page 1826). Furthermore, God commands us to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18, Page 1832). The Holy Spirit also distributes spiritual gifts for various ministries (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, Page 1796), and everyone has at least one spiritual gift to be used in spiritual ministry (1 Corinthians 12:7, Page 1796). Indeed, at the moment of salvation, Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11, Page 1504). From the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to live in your new life in Christ (Romans 8:9, Page 1768). Based upon all these truths about the Holy Spirit, we can

understand what a great role He intends to play in the daily life of the believer in Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Paul directed our attention to a command concerning the Holy Spirit. We must not "quench" ("σβέννυτε") the Holy Spirit. When you think about the word "quench" in the New Testament, consider these examples. The fires of hell are never quenched (Mark 9:48, age 1576), the lack of oil quenches burning lamps (Matthew 25:8, Page 1547), and the shield of faith quenches the flaming arrows of the devil (Ephesians 6:16, Page 1834). Finally, the Lord Jesus will not quench a smoldering wick (Matthew 12:20, Page 15:20). These graphic pictures help us understand that we have the power to quench the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives. **The idea of quench in this passage means that we halt, stop, restrain, or inhibit the activity of the Holy Spirit.** He will not leave you, but you can stop His work in areas of your life, and grieve Him in doing so.

Let us remember the context again. In this list of commands, we see that God demands that we rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything today. Now, if we keep those commands, then we will avoid quenching the work of the Holy Spirit in areas of our lives. The Holy Spirit constantly works to make our lives holy, and He always abides in us because we have been sealed by Him in Christ (Ephesians 4:30, Page 1831). The order of the commands here makes a difference, with one building upon the others. In fact, we could see that all the commands in the entire book interlace so that we could understand how to glorify God and become better friends in Christ. God gives us direction in how to live with other friends in relationships, and with Him, but also how we organize our minds. Let me emphasize one more thing about the command "do not quench." Paul used the plural of you. All of you do not quench the Holy Spirit. Just like the other commands, all of us have this same duty to God, and to one another. When I make the individual decision to sin, or stop praying, or stop rejoicing, I have a direct impact upon all my friends in Christ.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we allow the Holy Spirit to control my life, and I live in His power all the time, especially with my friends in Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when I do not quench the Holy Spirit in my life, and help my friends to avoid quenching His power. I am staggered that I can grieve the Holy Spirit, and quench His activity in areas of my life.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when allow our friends to fade off and fade out of our lives because they have quenched the Holy Spirit. We need to encourage each other to walk in the Spirit, and be filled with the Spirit.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to avoid quenching the Holy Spirit in my life. He seeks to produce His fruit in my life all the time, and I want Jesus to be Lord of all my life, all the time. Have you quenched the work of the Holy Spirit in your life today?

Day Eighty One

Prophetic Utterances Today

1 Thessalonians 5:20

“Do not despise prophetic utterances;”

I hear many people talking as if they were prophets. They tell me that they died, saw a great light, or felt a warm feeling, or spoke with loved ones who have died. They tell me they no longer fear death, because of what they have seen and experienced. Among Christians, I hear that a person had a word of prophecy for another Christian. So many people claim to be prophets, both within the church and outside the church. Whom do you believe and why are so many people claiming, on way or another, to be prophets?

In 1 Thessalonians 5:20 Paul commanded the Thessalonians not to despise prophetic utterances. Some people argue today that the New Testament gift of prophecy comes in two types: an authoritative type, where the prophet always speaks the truth. The other type of prophecy, according to this group, only contains some truth, mixed with error. If you read the Bible carefully, you will see that the entire Bible only contains information about one type of spiritual gift of prophecy, and God only speaks the truth. True prophets prophesy truthfully, and false prophets mix some truth with some error. In the last times, many false prophets will arise that will deceive many people. Those false prophets will even perform signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. Every prophet should be tested against the Scriptures. In Deuteronomy 13:1-5 (Page 309), God commanded the death penalty for every dreamer or false prophet that enticed people to serve any God but the true and living God of the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible provides: "You shall follow the LORD your God and

fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him and cling to Him" (Deuteronomy 13:4, Page 309). Therefore, every person who claims to have a prophecy from God should be examined by the other prophets to test whether their claim to have revelation from God agrees with Scripture, and God's complete revelation for all men (1 Corinthians 14:28-33, Page 1800; 1 John 4:1-6, Pages 1907-1908; 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Page 1864).

Therefore, in 1 Thessalonians 5:20, we know from the early church practice that two or three prophets may arise with their claim of a revelation from God. Remember, at that time, the New Testament had not been completely written and circulated among the churches. The churches relied upon God teaching them directly, with revelations through the twelve apostles, and also from prophets within the church. The issue, however, would always be whether the prophet was truly speaking a revelation from God. The others in the church, and particularly the prophets and elders, would evaluate the content of the prophet's message. The rule from Deuteronomy may have still weighed in the minds of many people, and so prophets may have been more reluctant to speak. **The main point, however, seems to be that the Thessalonians should not grow tired of hearing prophecies to the point where they despise any further prophetic utterances.** Revelation from God opens the mysteries of God to the people, and expands the knowledge of God and His plans in the assembly of believers.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we allow our spiritual gifts to edify other believers.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when do not despise prophetic utterance, or any other proper uses of spiritual gifts.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when inhibit the proper display of spiritual gifts.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to use my spiritual gifts to the glory of God, and encourage each of my friends in Christ to use their spiritual gifts. What are your spiritual gifts and are you using them to the glory of God today?

Day Eighty Two

Examine Everything Today

1 Thessalonians 5:21

“But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;”

Many people I know tend to believe everything they hear or see. They love Barack Hussein Obama, or Sarah Palin, or Rush Limbaugh, or some other political figure. For many professing believers, they spend more time on politics than they do reading their Bible, praying, or making disciples. They never take time to evaluate what the popular person has said. Instead, they tend to believe it because of who said it. Likewise, when you hear a preacher on television or at church on Sunday, do you examine carefully everything the preacher says and compare it to what Jesus said in the Bible? Many people just accept whatever they hear, because they trust the speaker.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 Paul commanded you to examine everything that comes your way in life. How do we examine something? The term "examine" ("δοκιμάζετε") means that you prove it, test it, demonstrate it, or discern its meaning. When prophets spoke in Thessalonica, the content of their prophecy was examined. We must examine all things. Consider even the interpretation of the Bible. The vast majority of passages in the Bible do not pose any problem of interpretation. Usually, the passages standing against popular opinions pose more of a challenge for some believers and they find some obscure interpretation to make the Bible match their current, popular view of some subject. For example, the Bible clearly labels homosexual behavior as sinful behavior. Likewise, being drunk is sinful behavior. Furthermore, in the church, women should never exercise authority over men, or teach men; rather they should remain silent

(1 Timothy 2:12, Page 1856). Popular ideas try to change the Bible, but God's word will never change. **Only some interpretations of the Bible will change, but no Scripture is a matter of private interpretation, because it was inspired by God alone.**

Having examined everything, Paul commanded us to hold fast to that which is good ("καλὸν"). Paul gave us very clear directions for thinking. In the past, I replaced a fuel line in my gas trimmer. The fuel line starts in the fuel tank and takes fuel to the carburetor. The carburetor has very fine holes in it that allow fuel to pass through in very small quantities, so it will burn properly in the engine. Those small holes can be clogged very easily. Therefore, the fuel line in the tank has a very fine filter, that prevents dirt or other impurities from ever getting to the rest of the fuel system. You see, carburetors must be treated with care, because they get clogged up with dirt very easily. Our lives are like that carburetor. Impurities tend to clog up our lives, especially our thinking, which often controls our acting. Paul warns us to filter everything that comes into our lives. We must examine everything, identify the good, and then hold fast to the good things. I often see my friends in Christ allowing all kinds of junk into their minds, because they do not know the Bible, and never read the Bible. They prefer to hear their trusted source tell them the truth. They trust ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox News, Drudge Report, or Politico to tell them the truth. Stop it! Only Jesus tells the truth all the time. You must evaluate everything you read in this book against the Bible itself. Hold on to the truth of God's word.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we examine everything and hold fast the good.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when encourage our friends to examine everything, hold on to the good, and stop believing something just because someone they respect said it. You do not have to believe everything your parents taught you, or that your pastor said. Compare what everyone said with the Word of God, the Bible, and hold on to the good.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when allow our friends in Christ to think whatever they wish and clog their minds and hearts with lies.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to examine everything and hold fast to that which is good. I will encourage my friends to examine everything today, and let go of the bad, and unclog their hearts and minds. Ready to start examining everything today?

Day Eighty Three

Abstain from Every Form of Evil Today

1 Thessalonians 5:22

“abstain from every form of evil.”

I know a group of people who love to drink beer, vodka, and strong drink whenever they can afford it. Some of them work some every day, but most of them either have no jobs or very meager, part-time employment. Evil comes in many forms for them. If any one of them wants to stop drinking, their companions are always there with a drink for them. Evil holds them in habits that their entire environment sustains.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:22 Paul issued another simple command, linked as we have seen to the entire list of commands preceding it. The command directs us to stop evil in our lives: "abstain from every form of evil." Paul made two points here we need to understand and apply to our lives.

First, the term "abstain" emphasizes your personal choice. You actually have the power in Christ to stop doing evil. As a believer, you will never be overwhelmed with temptation to the point where you cannot resist it (1 Corinthians 10:13, Page 1793). Will you in fact live a sinless life? No, you will always have a sin problem until you die (1 John 1:8-10, Page 1904). God, however, demands that you abstain from evil and use the power He gives you power to abstain from every evil work. Unbelievers struggle under the burden of slavery to sin. As believers living in the forgiveness of Christ, we died to sin so that we now live to righteousness. While we may never completely escape all sin in our lives before death, we

can grow in holiness by the power of God working daily in our lives. The choices we make about evil control the direction our lives will take. We can either walk in the Holy Spirit, or we can walk away from God. **Any specific sin plaguing our lives can be eliminated, right now, by the power of Jesus Christ.**

Second, Paul used the phrase "every form of evil." I am so happy to see the words "every form" ("παντὸς εἴδους") of evil. Jesus did not say, "Well, I can help you with some forms of evil, but other forms are just so bad, no one can help you." Instead, the promise here is that every form of evil Jesus has already triumphed over, and now, by His power, you can abstain from every form of evil. So, drugs, alcohol, adultery, fornication, immorality, homosexuality, drug addictions, evil depression, discouragement, and every other form of evil we face can be eliminated by Jesus Christ. He provides the power for overcoming every form of evil.

Summary from Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we abstain from every form of evil.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage our friends in Christ to trust the power of Jesus Christ to abstain from every form of evil.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when allow our friends in Christ to think Jesus Christ cannot remove every form of evil from their lives. In Christ, He will use friends to help His children triumph over every from of evil, one decision at a time.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to abstain from every form of evil and encourage my friends to know the triumph of the power of Jesus Christ in our lives. Will you abstain from every form of evil today?

19

Learning The Sanctification Blessing for Friends Today

Paul closed the Book of 1 Thessalonians with a prayer and a blessing of sanctification. Paul studied the Old Testament, and God revealed New Testament truth to Paul and the other authors. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote every word of 1 Thessalonians. Therefore, God breathed forth every word Paul wrote. We must attach special significance to the words Paul wrote, because God intends to change our lives by His knowledge.

The Sanctification Blessing means that Paul blessed his friends with a special request of God. Paul communicated that he wanted the God of Peace to sanctify the Thessalonians entirely. He also prayed that their spirit and soul and body would be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul also stressed the faithfulness of God who called us into salvation. Without God's faithfulness, His promises mean nothing and all of His words mean nothing. Because of God's faithfulness, we can rely upon every Word God has ever spoken, is speaking, or will speak. We must develop a strong relationship with the Word of God to strengthen our relationship with God Himself. God revealed Himself through the Bible, and spoken to us through His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Our friends in Christ need to hear the sanctification blessing. We can pray it with them and explain it them. We should all seek such sanctification in our lives, and live depending upon the faithfulness of God to keep His promises.

Day Eighty Four

Sanctify Today

1 Thessalonians 5:23

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and your soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Have you ever taken time to think about your spiritual life? How about your spiritual being? So many people teach that we are nothing more than molecules. So many people do not believe in a resurrection or after-life of any type. So many people do not understand what God wants to do for them, and to bring more joy to them than they could ever know apart from the Lord Jesus. So many people do not want the God of peace working to produce holiness in their lives.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul has provided a list of commands to change your life. As Paul concluded his first letter to the Thessalonians, he now invoked the blessing of God upon them. I often like to look at the particular title of God used in a particular verse. Please recall always that every word of the Bible has been chosen by God, without errors of any kind. Therefore, when Paul described God as "the God of peace," I take those words as a title of God in this passage. In Romans 5:1 (Page 1764), we read that believers have been justified by faith, and therefore, they have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ, you will never know God and you will never know His peace (John 14:6, Page 1684; John 14:27, Page 1685). Notice also the word "Himself" in our passage today. **God Himself will be doing His work in your life.**

Now we turn to the work God will be doing in your life: "sanctify." This word sanctify ("ἁγιάσαι") means to make holy, fit and separated for God's use and purposes. God seeks to work directly in your life to make you perfect before Him. He will do the work in your life. You turn your life over to Him by faith and He will work. Notice here the word "entirely." This word entirely ("ὁλόκληρον") means that God intends to change every part of who you are. In Christ, the moment you believed that Jesus Christ died in your place on the cross, and you accepted His gift of forgiveness, then you became a new creature in Christ.

Jesus taught us about several types of sanctification in the Bible. At least three related types of sanctification exist in the Bible. I will call the first Instant Sanctification. From the standpoint of salvation, at the instant you received the free gift of eternal life by faith alone, you were completely sanctified in Christ, because the penalty of your sins was forever and completely removed by the blood atonement of Jesus Christ. You no longer live under the wrath and judgment of God.

From the standpoint of daily experience, you still sin after salvation and need daily help with sin. So, I will call the second type of sanctification Daily Sanctification. In that sense, God continues to sanctify you over the course of your lifetime, and to produce His holiness in you. God works to remove sinful patterns and habits from your life by His sanctifying power and to produce His life and ways in your life and ways. As a new creature in Christ, you no longer live under the slavery of sin, and you now live to righteousness. Jesus also prays for the Father to sanctify His children in the truth of the word of God.

When we get to heaven, only then will our life be free from daily sins. Until then, if we say we have no sin, we are only deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. So, I will call the third type of sanctification Heavenly Sanctification. Once we arrive in heaven, we will be presented to Jesus Christ as holy and blameless children, eager to see our Savior and Lord and He will be eager to receive us unto Himself, so that we may dwell with Him forever.

Paul also refers to the body, soul and spirit. Many Bible scholars have researched the question of what makes up a man. Do we have a body? Yes,

that question does not pose a problem for anyone except gnostics and docetists, who both deny the Bible and the true divinity of Jesus Christ because they both deny that Jesus had real human flesh. Now we get to the harder questions. Does the Bible show that man has both a soul ("ψυχή") and spirit ("πνεῦμα")? Many people use this passage in 1 Thessalonians to prove that man has only body, soul and spirit. They teach a tri-partite view of man. In contrast, others see the Bible as teaching an immaterial part of man (spirit, soul, mind of Christ, heart, conscience, etc.) and a material part of man (body). You may learn many things from studying passages related to whom we are in Christ, but for today, I simply want to focus upon the text before us. God wants to sanctify every part of you, for His glory and use right now and throughout eternity.

Finally, notice that the purpose of God's sanctifying work centers upon presenting us blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God never agrees to let believers continue to sin. He seeks to sanctify our lives continuously. I take great hope and feel tremendously blessed when I ponder God's plan for my life. He wants to make me blameless when Christ comes for me. I will not have to take special self-help courses, or make my own fleshly efforts to change my life, or join some new fad or program for better living. No, God Himself has already committed to sanctifying me so that I will be blameless before Him. My task hinges upon obedience to His work, being filled with the Holy Spirit, keeping His commandments, taking up my cross, and following Jesus everyday--all done by His power alone.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we understand that God sanctifies our lives and every part of us in Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we encourage others to have faith in the sanctifying work of God in every part of their lives.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when resist the sanctifying work of God in our lives, and fail to recognize the progressive work of God among us. None of us are**

perfect yet and without sin. Love covers a multitude of unsanctified behavior.

Application for Today

Today, I want to receive God's sanctifying work in every part of my life. Supernaturally, I want to see it, feel it, and enjoy it. Will you be trusting God to continue His work of sanctification today?

Day Eighty Five

Faithful Is He Who Calls You Today

1 Thessalonians 5:24

“Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”

I love so many things about Jesus. He provides me with love every moment of my life, friendship, power for living, assurance, strength, and compassion. I absolutely rely upon Him to take care of my life, because I so frequently mess it up. As I grow older, I know that without Jesus controlling my life, sin abounds. I also know something else. Jesus wants to bring about all the commands He has promised me in 1 Thessalonians 5, because He has called me, and He will keep me secure in His calling for eternity. Jesus Christ the Faithful holds me in His calling every day. He will do it.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:24 Jesus described Himself as "Faithful," and then shortly closed the epistle. This term faithful ("πιστός") means trustworthy, reliable, sure, true, and unfailing. All of those qualities always apply to Jesus, but in this context they relate to God who "calls" ("καλῶν"). Paul emphasized here that the call of God for you stands as a completed act. He has called us and that settles it. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12, (Page 1847), Paul wrote: "so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." In this latter verse, God revealed the continuous aspects of His calling, and related it to your daily, ongoing walk with Christ.

Paul also taught that Jesus will do it. Because of Jesus being always faithful, He will bring your call to pass. Again, Jesus revealed here that my entire salvation and sanctification rest squarely upon His shoulders. I should never get confused about the activity of God in my life. On the eternal scale, He called me to salvation and adoption into His family.

Paul left the Thessalonians with all the focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul shone the spotlight of revelation upon Jesus. **faithfulness radiates from Jesus.** We should always see Jesus shining in faithfulness, always keeping His word, always making our lives wonderful in Him.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we see Jesus faithfully working in our lives, and the lives of our friends in Christ, called by His grace.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we have faith in the faithfulness of Christ Jesus, shining in our lives through the work He performs, and the love He provides every day.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we doubt the faithfulness of Christ in our lives, or allow our friends to forget His faithfulness.**

Application for Today

Today, I want the faithfulness of Jesus to be on my mind, in my heart, and on my lips. My friends in Christ need to know about His faithfulness to me today. Will you dwell upon the faithful Lord Jesus today?

20

Learning To Ask Friends for Prayer Today

Some of my friends do not like to ask others to pray for them. They would rather pray for the lives of other people, if and when they pray. From my personal observations, the people who do not ask others to pray for themselves do not read the Bible very much. Many people in the Bible encourage other believers to pray for them.

Paul taught many things about making disciples. He made disciples in many different places, in various cultures, and over decades of activity. Paul wrote Scripture and had a personal visit with Jesus Christ more than once. Paul encouraged people to pray for him and the ministry team. As believers, we need the prayers of our friends in Christ.

In some cases, people do ask for prayer, but only for the most mundane things. They never really disclose anything meaningful to them or deeply important to them. Sometimes if we get sick enough, we request prayer. Paul taught disciples to learn to ask for prayer from your friends in Christ.

Day Eighty Six

Pray for Us Today

1 Thessalonians 5:25

“Brethren, pray for us.”

Have you ever said to your friends seeking prayer requests, "I don't like to pray for myself and what I need because that is selfish"? I have heard many people utter those words. People who say that do not understand the basic concepts of prayer, and their view of God reflects their own ignorance of Him.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:25, Paul not only invited prayer for himself, he commands it. In fact, he commands the Thessalonians to pray for the entire ministry team. When is the last time you asked for anyone to pray for you or your ministry team? Are you even a part of a small group of men or women pursuing ministry together? Paul knew the value of prayer and he knew that God loves to hear from His children and lead them in triumphant grace.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:1 (Page 1853), Paul again asked the Thessalonians to pray for himself and the ministry team. He specifically sought prayer for the spread of the word of the Lord, and rescue from perverse and evil men. Paul's prayer request there let his friends in Christ share in God's plans for the ministry team.

Prayer also recognizes the need for God's power in your life. Without God working, your ministry will go nowhere. You will not see people asking Christ to forgive them. You will not see disciples being made in Christ. You will not be forming new friendships in Christ and you will

not watch the Body of Christ growing and being edified. Everything that happens for good upon this earth, and in the universe, depends upon God as the source of that spiritual activity. I praise God that Jesus said: "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18, Page 1530).

If you are reluctant to ask other people to pray for you, not only are you thinking that you run your life without God's help, or at least conveying that impression to others, but you are also teaching others not to seek the prayer support of others. In John 17:1 (Page 1689), Jesus prayed for Himself. He asked God the Father to glorify God the Son (Himself). Of course Jesus prayed for Himself, and so should we. In fact, we need to ask for our friends in Christ to pray for us. Remember the words of God: "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2, Page 1891). Your prayer requests for yourself should be one way you share God's purposes for your life and ministry with your friends in Christ. Furthermore, Jesus commanded His disciples to pray for themselves (Matthew 6:9-13, Page 1509; Matthew 26:41, Page 1551).

Consider also the claim: "I do not ask other people to pray for me because that would be selfish." We have already seen that Jesus prayed for Himself, and Paul commanded other people to pray for him and the ministry team. I recall an illustration from a famous preacher. He talked about a small fish taking water through his mouth to breathe. He breathed slowly, for fear he would exhaust all the oxygen in the water. He had no idea of the tremendous, virtually limitless supply of water and oxygen available to him in that giant river he lived in. People who never request prayer support for themselves must lack a sense of God's power, God's care for them individually, and God's great personal love. People somehow must think that God must be too busy to listen to their prayers about themselves, and so live in ignorance of God. God hears all things, knows all things, is present everywhere, has all power, and never changes. He knows every thought you have, and knows all the future and all the past of your life. In fact, he knows the number of hairs on your head at any given time, past, present and future. So, never let your small, fishy view of God hamper you from praying for yourself, and from sharing your prayer requests with other believers.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we ask our friends in Christ to pray for us.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we pray for one another, and share from the heart our prayer requests with each other.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do not share our spiritual needs, purposes, and desires with our friends, and ask for their prayer support for our lives.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to share my prayer requests with my friends in Christ. I love to pray for my friends, and frequently pray with friends in person and on the telephone. Will you share your personal prayer requests with anyone today?

21

Learning To Greet the Brethren Today

I have several friends who do not like to be touched by people, especially strangers. Things in their past have created a personal space requirement they like to keep intact. No one should violate that space requirement, or else they feel uncomfortable.

I also have friends who really enjoy a hug as a greeting at the beach. The type of greeting depends upon the person and the relationship. Greeting strangers with a hug may not be appropriate. Paul taught people that greetings can be very important.

Paul commanded the brethren to greet one another with a holy kiss. People may take this quite literally and greet one another with a holy kiss. I expect that you have seen people in foreign countries greet one another with multiple kisses. Even in the United States, in some groups kissing one another on the cheek can be practically mandatory as a greeting. It all depends upon the group and the circumstances.

In all cases, believers should be greeting one another and do so in holiness. Regular kisses were never part the greeting Paul had in mind. He commanded special kisses for greetings. They must be holy in every aspect. Greeting people must always be done properly, and with good effect. It may be the last time you see them face to face.

Day Eighty Seven

Greet the Brethren Today

1 Thessalonians 5:26

“Greet the brethren with a holy kiss.”

A holy kiss can be a very precious greeting, and in some social circles today, people do it all the time. For other people, especially men in America, a holy kiss has become culturally disfavored in some groups. Instead, a handshake, hug, or other gesture may be enough. The point, however, is the holy greeting.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:26 we read about the command to greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. Please notice first that Paul extended the greeting to all the brethren, not just some. Do you have people you know in Christ whom you do not want to greet? Why do you not want to greet them? Paul made it plain that he wanted to be on good terms with everyone at Thessalonica, and all were to be greeted.

This greeting with a kiss seems to be a regular custom in the New Testament world. In Romans 16:16 (Page 1781) we read the same expression: "Greet one another with a holy kiss." Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 16:20 (Page 1804): "All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss." Again in 2 Corinthians 13:12 (Page 1819) and 1 Peter 5:14 (Page 1899) we read about greeting one another with a holy kiss (kiss of love). The common custom among those people and churches involved a holy kiss.

We touch here upon a question of "culture" versus "absolute command." You could certainly argue that Paul commanded these people

to kiss one another with a holy kiss. So must we greet one another with a holy kiss? You would be doing nothing wrong to do so, provided you made it holy and the other guy knew what was coming. But, Paul does not use any theological reasons for supporting this command to kiss the brethren, so you could also argue it was culturally appropriate back then, but in America today, it may, at times, culturally inappropriate. **The bottom line here is that anytime you do what the Bible commands, such as greet each other with a holy kiss, you should not face grief from anyone, provided it is a holy kiss.**

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we greet one another with a holy kiss.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we use our greetings to let the other person know that we love them in the holiness of Jesus Christ.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we ignore believers and separate ourselves from other believers without a Scriptural reason to do so.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to greet my friends in the holiness of Jesus Christ. I have never been comfortable giving kisses to everyone I know, but I will certainly give them some holy hugs in Christ Jesus. I want them to know I love them in Christ. Whom will greet today in the holiness of Jesus Christ?

22

Learning To Read the Bible with Friends Today

Most of my friends know that I truly enjoy reading the Bible with my friends. When they come to the table at the beach, they know I will be opening the Bible and reading it with them. In fact, many of friends come to the table for that exact reason. Together we meet to draw strength and encouragement from the Word of God, and enjoy prayer and fellowship together. We love to worship God and praise Him for all that God is and that God does.

We should include time to read the Bible every day with friends and family. You may recall that God commanded fathers in Deuteronomy 6:7 (Page 297) to teach their children daily, and many times per day, about God. Can you imagine fathers teaching their children about God without reading the Bible to them? Children should learn about reading the Bible from their parents. The same holds true in making disciples.

God alone teaches us His words. He revealed them to us in the Bible. The original autographs of the Bible, with their verbal and plenary inspiration, convey to us the revelations of God Himself. He provides everything we need for the Christian life and to do His will.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees and others for not reading the Bible with understanding that only God can give. In order to understand the Bible, and the words of God, you must be willing to do the will of God (John 7:17, Page 1668). The Holy Spirit teaches us all things as believers, and so we must rely upon Him as we read the Bible. Jesus also calls Himself the teacher, and the Father commanded believers to listen to His Son. Reading the Bible with friends in Christ deepens our fellowship with each other and

Building Strong Friendships in Christ

with God. We will love God more and each other more and more as we read the Word of God together.

Day Eighty Eight

Read to All the Brethren Today

1 Thessalonians 5:27

“I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.”

Reading the letters in the Bible makes a huge difference in your life. In fact, when you read the Bible, God speaks to everyone who has ears to hear. He reveals Himself spiritually to every open heart, filled with faith, hope and love. Peter recognized that his "beloved brother Paul, according to the grace given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures . . ." (2 Peter 3:5-16, Page 1903). Peter understood that Paul wrote Scripture, of the same inspired quality as the Old Testament.

In Colossians 4:16 (Page 1846), Paul wrote that the Epistle to the Colossians should also be read in the church of Laodicea. Paul understood that he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16, Page 1864). The value of the Word of God cannot be understated. During the New Testament times, the gifts of tongues and prophecy brought the inspired Word of God to the individual churches, but God determined that some of His apostles would produce the enduring legacy of the New Testament as we know it.

Paul knew that the spiritual principles he wrote to the Thessalonians would be an enduring benefit to all Christians. God had revealed His message for the particular church of Thessalonica, but the words of the letter were, from the beginning, intended for the wider audience of all Christians. The power of the Word of God put into the

Epistles of the New Testament show how God intended to circulate His word throughout the churches of that age, and even further through the centuries. Please recall that Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away, but His words would never pass away (Matthew 24:35, Page 1546).

Paul emphasized two final points here. First, he adjured ("Εvoγκίζω") the Thessalonians to read the epistle to everyone. Notice that Paul used this strong word to make sure that they did as he asked. Adjure means to command sternly as if under a penalty for disobedience.

Second, Paul also said everyone should hear it read. For so many centuries, people did not have the access to the Bible that we have today. We no longer have to go to a church to touch a Bible, but most of us have a Bible in our homes, and some of us have several Bibles. Owning a Bible is nothing like reading a Bible. The command remains the same: Paul "adjures" us to read it.

Paul intended public reading of the letter to all the brethren. Group reading can have great benefits. It can bring shared joys, deeper insights, and many other blessings into our lives at the same time. Paul commanded the people to listen as a group to the letter, so that everyone would be blessed together. Paul never showed partiality or played favorites. **The Word of God comes to everyone, and those who join faith to hearing the Word of God will become effectual doers of the Word of God.**

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we read the Word of God, and we know that God has preserved it through the centuries for our benefit.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we follow the teaching of the Word of God, and encourage our friends in Christ to read the Word of God with us, and live it together.**

- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we do not read the Bible with our friends, and do not encourage each other from the Word of God.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to read the Bible with my friends in Christ. I want to encourage them from the great love letters of the New Testament with God's grace and goodness to each one of us. I want to read from the Prophets of the Old Testament, and see God bring His plans to completion. All the Bible, over a lifetime, will occupy my time with my friends in Christ. What will you do with your friends today?

23

Learning To Close with Grace Today

The last words we say to people can also have great effect. We must learn to close with the grace of God. Our final words to our friends may be our final words to anyone. Paul wrote about the grace of God in many places and for many reasons. He also used the grace of God as both an introductory greeting and also a closing blessing. For example in 1 Thessalonians, Paul greeted the Thessalonians with “Grace to you and peace” (1 Thessalonians 1:1, Page 1846). He closed the same letter with very similar words.

Grace emphasizes the free and wonderful gifts we get from God without deserving them. For believers, we enjoy Christmas on many levels each day. The joys of receiving gifts from God and the wonderful presence of the Lord Jesus in our lives makes all the difference each day. Paul used his greetings to place certain thoughts in the minds of the readers. With the word “grace” Paul called to mind the free gifts and character of our loving God.

Closing words can do great harm or great good. If we have lost our temper and uttered threats, or gave someone a piece of our mind because they had offended us, then we were likely to have given them a greeting without love. Likewise, in the church we often do not give some people a greeting because we would like to avoid them. At times, we must avoid greeting some people so that we do not participate in their evil deeds. Generally, however, we must learn to close with grace today. We will leave the grace of God flowing through the minds of our friends in Christ.

Day Eighty Nine

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

Be with You Today

1 Thessalonians 5:28

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you today.”

Grace means that God gives me something good that I do not deserve. Mercy means that God withholds punishment that I do deserve. When Paul bids people grace, he uses it as both an opening greeting and also a closing blessing. The doctrine of grace covers so many wonderful blessings from God that it floods my heart with joy to think about how good and gracious the Lord Jesus is to me every single day.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:28, Paul ended the epistle with those famous words: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." He called to mind three separate points in this one verse.

First, grace provides everything we have from God, because the only thing we truly earn as wages is death, as a result of our sin. Salvation, and all the blessings we have from God, come through grace, because we never earned them, or deserved them. When we keep in mind that all of our friends in Christ came through grace alone, then we value them all the more.

Second, the grace comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice this title for Jesus. Paul declared here the Lordship of Christ, as the provider of all grace to us. Jesus is the source of grace, the result of grace, the beginning

of grace, the perfection of grace, and so on. Without Jesus, we have no grace. With Jesus, we have all grace. But keep in mind that Paul used the term Lord to describe Jesus. Grace never provides a license to sin, but rather the means of loving obedience to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Third, Paul sent the grace to all of us. So often, I enjoy knowing that in Christ Jesus, we all stand before the same Lord. He pours His grace upon each believer, and each one of us knows the grace of God. We live and move in His grace. We came to know Him by grace alone. His grace covers each one of us, and Paul closes the letter without playing favorites at Thessalonica, but using words of unity in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary for Today

- **Strong bonds of friendship form when we stand together as friends in Christ in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- **Strong bonds of friendship grow when we live in the grace given to us, and encourage one another to live in that grace from the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- **We harm our bonds of friendship when we forget about grace, and do not do the things that our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to do.**

Application for Today

Today, I want to remind my friends in Christ to live in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to encourage them to see His grace ever present in our lives, and to see Jesus living with us as friends in grace. Will you be living in grace, and know it, today?