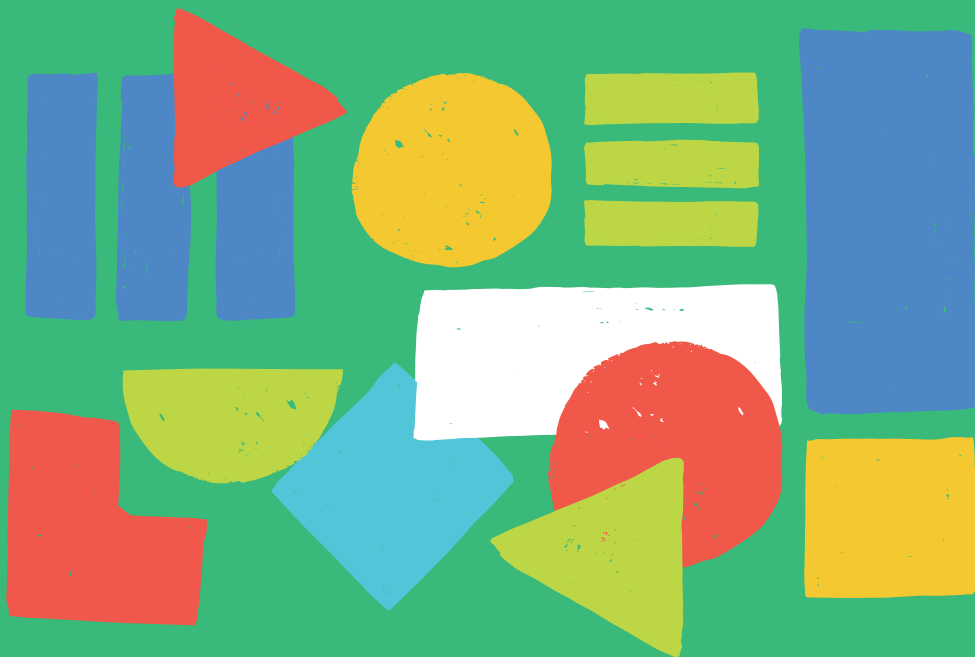


HOW TO BE **CHURCH**

1 THESSALONIANS



HOW TO BE CHURCH:

1 THESSALONIANS

Sometime in the late AD 40s, about 15 or so years after the resurrection of Jesus, two significant leaders called Paul and Silas travelled to the city of Thessalonica to tell people about Him.

A number of people in this small city became Christians, and they formed a group which became known as an *ekklesia*, or *gathering*. After 2000 years, we have all sorts of inherited assumptions about what church is, but in the first century, 'church' was brand new, it was a rag-tag group of new Christians who were still working out what following Jesus as a community actually looked like in real life.

A few years after they had left the city, Paul, Silas and their friend Timothy wrote to this new church, the letter which we call now call *1 Thessalonians*, and this letter does three things that help us think about church culture:

1. It looks **back** to the good things that had happened there; the decisions, emphases and character qualities that set the church up to thrive.
2. It snapshots their **present** reality - how they were growing nicely in being Jesus followers at the point when Paul wrote to them.
3. It looks **forward** to what the Thessalonian church could do in future to continue in good health. It also looks even further ahead, to the end of the world.

Put all this together, and we have the New Testament's best example of a thriving, healthy church, formed less than 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, with lots of insights into how it ended up that way. All those centuries of Christians making mistakes and emphasising the wrong things hadn't happened yet!



The letter of 1 Thessalonians could be divided up as follows; each part telling us something vital to understanding what made the church in that city a model.



IDENTITY



MESSAGE



CULTURE



MATURITY



LEADERSHIP



RELATIONSHIPS



PURPOSE



HABITS

By spending some significant time in this letter, we should be encouraged, reassured, challenged, and equipped for our journey onwards as a church. Our hope is that we increasingly become a church made in the image and way of Jesus, and nothing else.

1 THESSALONIANS

CHURCHES WITH A MODEL CULTURE

Whilst studying particular passages is always very helpful, there are some very important things that can be drawn out by looking across the letter as a whole, seeing which themes and ideas reoccur. It might be helpful to draw attention to one or more of these at some point as we journey through the series.

CHURCHES WITH A 'MODEL' CULTURE...

Understand their identity in terms of being 1) in Jesus and 2) in highly committed family relationships with one another.

1 Thessalonians begins, significantly, with the reminder that the church are 'in Jesus'. This is their controlling identity; the truth about who they are that precedes other ideas, philosophies and activities. Everything else in the book is built on this. A vital implication of this is that the Thessalonians are in 'family' relationships with one another. There is no doubt the this was also of high importance to their self-understanding. The temptations to see church in other ways, such as an institution or religious club, would have made little sense to them.

Begin and end with the wonderful news about Jesus, the Gospel, and turn it into practical wisdom on how to live.

The letter is packed with theology, and as is Paul's regular writing habit, it begins with theology as a priority before looking to anything practical. However the two go hand in hand. Good theology without practice is simply academic, practise without good theology is simply moralistic do-gooding. Paul begins with the Gospel message, never deviating from it in application. The Gospel is the 'big picture' good news *and* it is the framework for small-scale decisions and behaviours. It is an *event* and a *way* that are inextricable in the life of the church.

CHURCHES WITH A 'MODEL' CULTURE...

Have leaders who love and invest in people, counting it as a joy.

The Thessalonian church benefited greatly from Paul and his friends, and probably had some good leaders after they'd gone, too. The way Paul undertook leadership, which we can see glimpsed regularly throughout the text, was deeply sacrificial. There is little evidence of podiums, PR or power-dressing to impress, and there is ample evidence of a man who put a frankly crazy amount of passion, energy, and resilience into loving a local church. Today, there are lots of leaders who work hard and love their church, but who find doing so to be draining. Paul derived a tangible joy from the Thessalonians, likely because the Gospel message had so inculcated him that he was able to love well even through the arduous of working with messy people.

It is also clear that good Christian leadership was not predicated on merely 'being nice', but rather on a wider range of tools that included urging, encouraging, truth-speaking, praying, admonishing and communicating affection. Undeniably, the overriding goal was the spiritual development of others, above the completion of tasks or the growth of profile.

Put good character above all other traits and talents.

Frog Orr-Ewing notes, *'The church and western society in general have moved quickly from speaking in terms of character, to understanding the self in terms of personality.'* It is difficult to emphasise how important character is to the Biblical understanding of living well. How different would the world be if every church put good character at the top of the tree! The preacher Martin Lloyd Jones once said *'The great concern of the New Testament Epistles is not about the size of the church, it is about the purity of the church'*. In other words, God is less concerned about the number of bums on seats, and more concerned about the extent to which people actually live in His ways. If the church is a place of good character, everything else that matters follows downstream. As Naomi Walmsley once commented, *'It's better to model a value than to value a model'*. Above any fashionable way of doing church activity, simply being like Jesus in attitude is what counts.

Expect but contextualise suffering, especially in anticipation of Jesus' coming return.

Paul expected the Thessalonians to suffer. They already had, but more was surely coming. It is very tempting to think of suffering as mere purposeless inconvenience, and some churches even teach the nonsense that suffering is always a direct result of deficient faith. No, suffering is *normative* for followers of Jesus, and particularly *because* of following Jesus. However, it can be endured differently, even to the astonishment of the wider world, when seen in light of Jesus' return.

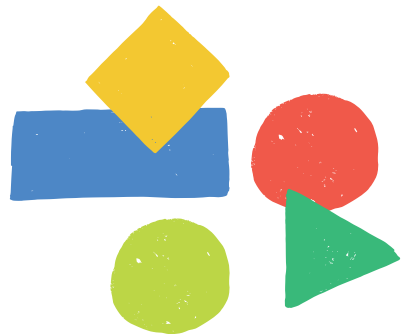
Actively pursue good relationships with both God and other people

It is common for today's churches, at least in affluent settings, to put a big emphasis on projects and initiatives. From training courses to food distributions to 'discipleship' programs, the church is involved in all sorts of things. Most of it is *excellent*. Most of it has a place. However, 1 Thessalonians shows us that churches are at their best when they help people become more like Jesus in their attitudes and behaviours. Often, projects and programs will *help* accomplish this, but we must be

mindful that the end goal is that the Gospel is communicated, embraced and lived out in steady but wonderful character change. Jesus is the only thing the church uniquely has to offer the world, and He happens to be the thing the world needs most.

Trust God that there will be fruit in our lives, His Spirit will move, and the ending is good.

When we trust God and do as He asks, it is inevitable that we will see the fruit in our lives - much as we may not be able to predict what that fruit will be. One day, He will make all things as they should be and we His people will enjoy eternal life with our God.



GUIDELINES FOR LEADING GROUP SESSIONS

TAKEAWAYS

We hope these takeaways sessions can help groups continue to grow and learn more together.

We think groups work best when we are able to encourage one another to be ‘doers of the word’ and not just hearers or people who enjoy a good discussion! These takeaways are designed so that anyone can give leading a go. Here's a little bit about of information each section and some guidance on how to lead them.

INTRODUCTION

Each session has an introduction that shares and explains a little about the passage of scripture and theme. It can be read out and is helpful to keep this in mind when steering discussion.

SHARE

These are intentionally accessible questions (like an icebreaker) so everyone has the opportunity to comment and share. They can be used in pairs to discuss together and then give feedback to the whole group (if enabling everyone to speak to the whole group is difficult).

READ

The passages we want to unpack. Read them together, preferably once aloud and then giving time for people read through themselves in quiet.

DISCUSS

The aim of discussion is for members to discover and go deeper in their understanding of scriptural truths. It's about encouraging moments of sharing and insight from others in a non-threatening environment that allows for doubts to be expressed, questions (nothing is too silly), and silence (not all will have anything to contribute to the discussion).

Allow moments of openness and off-topic tangents to shape the meeting.

There are often more questions than you can cover in one group session, so feel free to pick and choose ones that are helpful or that flow with the natural discussion of the group.

TRY OUT

These are a list of ideas to help you carry out the teaching into your week. You can add your own or take the opportunity to ask the group how they might live out some of the learnings in their day-to-day life.

They are about:

- Inspiring curiosity, so it must not feel like a 'to do' list or pressured in any way.
- Being real and thinking about what's coming up in their lives that could be opportunities to put teaching into practice.
- Being accountable – encouraging people to name what they might try this week (even if they need prayer for it), and asking them to prepare to share their experiences at the next meeting.

Most 'Try Out' options will likely be for individuals to try on their own. But you may like to consider some options that are for the group to do service together.

PRAY & REFLECT

Prayer points around the sermon/ takeaway theme may be included to help you pray for one another, or there is space for the facilitator to lead:

- Feedback on answered prayer for praise items from your group
- Sharing stories for encouragement – more prayer and worship
- Praying for help into what they have committed to try. We want to encourage reliance on God's help to deepen discipleship relationship to Jesus.
- Prayer for personal needs

PART 1: IDENTITY

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1



SHARE

If someone was to ask you who you are, what would you say?

What do we mean by 'identity'?

INTRODUCTION

You may wish to read out the series introduction on pages 3 and 4.

1 Thessalonians begins with the reminder that the church are 'in Jesus'. This is their controlling identity and everything else in the letter is built on this. A vital implication of this is that they are in 'family' relationships with one another.

Today there is a temptation to see church in other ways, such as an institution or religious club. This would have made little sense to the Thessalonian believers.

American preacher and theologian, Tim Keller wrote: *'Every other systems says, if you follow the rules, if you compete, if you perform, then you're accepted. Christianity says no, I'm accepted in Jesus Christ, therefore I perform.'*

Without being 'in Jesus', most of what this letter has to say would just be nice sounding moral and social advice with a few interesting theological ideas thrown in. But with Jesus, it's a whole

new wonderful way of seeing life, the universe and remarkably to our modern culture, even how you see yourself. It's the basis of a healthy church.

READ

1 Thessalonians 1:1.

DISCUSS

What insights does this verse give us about the nature of church? List as many as you can. (We know, its only one verse!)

What does the world tell you about who you are? What has some truth to it and what is unhelpful?

Why is it important that we are 'in' not just God the Father but 'the Lord Jesus Christ'? Why do all 3 names/titles given to Jesus in this context matter?

What traits do you think would be very evident in someone who very practically found their core identity in Jesus?

Where would you like to see the identity God has given you have a transformative effect on your character in the coming year?

Why is it so important that a healthy church builds on the foundation of our identity in Jesus over anything else?

SHARE & REFLECT

As time allows, spend some time sharing and reflecting on scripture that remind us of our identity in Jesus. You may want to write them down for everyone to see.

- Who does God say we are?
- What are the titles or attributes given to His people?
- How would you like to see your God-given identity have a transformative effect on your character in the coming year?

You may like to read a Psalm or play a worship song that speaks of our identity in Christ as you reflect or to close.

Till I Found You – Phil Wickham

youtu.be/svJL_CA6Wqc?si=WmHkq9R-DtMNLX4N

Who you say I am – Hillsong Worship

youtu.be/lcC1Bp13n_4



PRAY

- Spend time praying for one another and over the words and verses shared.
- Pray that you would live in the light of our identity in Christ.

- Where would you like to see the identity God has given you have a transformative effect on your character in the coming year? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you change.
- Discuss the 'try-outs' or ways to you can apply what you have learnt to your daily life. Pray for God's help as you do.

TRY OUT

- In your week, continue to reflect on where would you like to see your God-given identity have a transformative effect on your character.
- Where and when are you most likely to put other identities above your identity in Christ? It may be a relationship like being a parent, a married or single person. You may put your job title, occupation or even the way you serve at church above your identity in Christ or have an unhealthy focus on your successes or failures...
- What next steps, relationship or habits can help you remain in Christ? Share with a trusted friend what next steps you are going to take.
- Try texting or sending a note to your group or a friend with a different verse and encouragement of our identity in Jesus each day.

PART 2: MESSAGE

1 THESSALONIANS 1:2-10



SHARE

What's the best news you've ever heard? Why was it so?

INTRODUCTION

The foundation for everything that happened in Thessalonica and anything good in church history was the *Gospel*; from a Greek word that simply means 'good news'. That's the ideal phrase because the message that the church was built on was *news* in that it was about historical events – Jesus' death and resurrection – it was more than a philosophy, *but it was also qualitative*. It was *good*. It was not something to be dispassionate about. It was something to give your life to.

Pastor and Theologian Ray Ortlund writes: *'When the gospel is taught clearly, and the people of the church believe it deeply, it does more than renew us personally. The doctrine of grace also creates a culture of grace. In such a church, the gospel is both articulated at the obvious level of doctrine and embodied at the subtle level of vibe, ethos, feel, relationships and community. Without the doctrine, the culture is unsustainable. Without the culture, the doctrine appears pointless.'*

READ

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

DISCUSS

In your own words: what does this passage tell us was absolutely critical to the growth of the Thessalonian church in its earliest days?

What *is* the Gospel message that the New Testament authors were so focused on living and sharing, in your own words?

Why do we often get excited at things that are not the Gospel – projects, ideas, philosophies, approaches, political views, etc? How can we prevent this from happening?

Given that we're all imperfect people, what is it to be a 'model' of the Gospel? How can we do that better, not merely as individuals, but as a community? What sort of things would help us to do this, based on the text?

Why is it vital that local church communities are built entirely on the Gospel message and nothing else?

REFLECT

You may like to play a worship song to close (or even at the start) that speaks of the truth of the Gospel.

This I believe – Hillsong Worship

[youtu.be/uuDI-sk2nJU?
si=D1xKtsLStcLTVIWy](https://youtu.be/uuDI-sk2nJU?si=D1xKtsLStcLTVIWy)



Cornerstone – Hillsong Worship

[youtu.be/FI15U2ifYzo?si
=toJzRkWRKPB93-3i](https://youtu.be/FI15U2ifYzo?si=toJzRkWRKPB93-3i)



PRAY

- Pray that as believers and God's people we might understand the good news of Jesus.
- Discuss the 'try-outs' or ways you can apply what you have learnt to your daily life. Pray for God's help as you do.

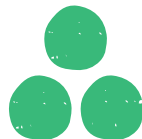
TRY OUT

- There's a popular social media trend that asks followers to share *'things people believe that are not in the Bible!* Reflect on any ideas, political views, philosophies, habits or church cultural norms that you believe that are not derived from the Gospel.
- Spend some time writing out in your own words how you would describe the gospel message to a friend.
- According to Paul in this short section of 1 Thessalonians, the things that made the church in Thessalonica stand out are faith, hope, love, joy despite suffering, and a turning from idols (things other than God). Spend some time in prayer, reflecting on what it looks like for you to be known for these qualities and pray that others will see evidence that the Word of God has come in power in your life.

PART 3:

CULTURE

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12



SHARE

Have you been in an environment or a country that is completely different to your own or what you are used to? How was it different? What surprised you about it?

What are some things that define a culture? For example, music, language...

INTRODUCTION

Pastor, apologist and author Sam Allberry writes: *'We humans are culture creators. How we are around each other will always take on a particular relational dynamic, a shared personality, a noticeable tone. It can never be otherwise. We shape one another in many complex ways, and a resulting culture always emerges. It's true of friendship groups, of workplaces, of families, and of churches. There will always be a vibe, a feel, an intangible but powerful way the group tends to be together'*. Let's unpack what 1 Thessalonians has to say around creating healthy church culture.

READ

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

DISCUSS

What was absolutely *critical* to the healthy culture of the early Thessalonian church?

Why is the *character* of God's people as they serve Him much more important than their strategies and

methods? What does this say about God? What does it say about church?

In your own words, what clues does the passage give us about the foundations of healthy church culture?

Where do you presently see 'results' in terms of fruit 1) in your own life and 2) at Maybridge Community Church?

Do any of the traits you see here stand out as something a) you feel the need to grow in personally or b) our church needs to grow in?

How many people do you think need to embody some values in order for them to become the culture of a group or church?

Author Robert Morris writes, *'Having a church culture is not optional. You will have one. You can either be intentional and purpose driven about what kind of culture you create, or you can just let 'what will be will be'*.

What are the key things to building the right culture at Maybridge? What is your part in it?

TRY OUT

- Reflect on the group's discussion and share practical ways you can apply what you have learnt to your daily life – How does it cause you to think or act? Is there anything you feel the need to grow in? Share what steps you can take to help you grow.

PRAY

PART 4:

MATURITY

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-16



SHARE

Who has been the most impactful person in terms of supporting and encouraging you to live out your faith? What did that person do for you that brought them to mind?

INTRODUCTION

In this session, we'll explore how when a church is healthy, and people imitate faith in others and become imitable themselves, growth is *inevitable*. Impacting our community is inevitable. When the Spirit of God takes hold of a church and it is truly a family, characterised with purpose and humility and relationships and commitment – all centred on God – lives will change. People will become followers of Jesus. People will mature. Other places and other churches will be impacted too. And it is *incredible*.

READ

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

DISCUSS

Paul looks back on how new Christians in Thessalonica responded to hearing the Gospel, and their route to maturity. How would you describe this in your own words? What stands out to you from this passage?

What things might look like maturity, but aren't?

Do you want to be a mature Christian? Why or why not?

Accept, Imitate, Suffer... to what extent do you feel like you've done each of these things in your own faith journey?

How easy do you find it to accept what God says? When you encounter tricky or controversial parts of His word, how do you tend to respond? What would you *like* to do when you find accepting what God says to be a real struggle?

Whose faith journey have you imitated? Who would you like to imitate?

Is a person who isn't suffering for following Jesus actually following Jesus? Discuss!

PRAY & REFLECT

You may like to play a worship song to help you reflect and invite Jesus strengthen you to grow in spiritual maturity.

Be thou my vision –
Audrey Assad
youtu.be/Optrm7IF16s?si=YcEXafHIIYK1IAEe



As time allows, pray for one another individually that each of you may grow in maturity. You may find it helpful to echo Paul's prayers in Colossians 1:9-12 & Ephesians 3:16-19.

PART 5: LEADERSHIP

1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-3:13



SHARE

What do you think makes a good leader? Why?

INTRODUCTION

In all his writings, amounting to half the New Testament, Paul calls only two things ‘good news’ – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for all humanity and Timothy’s report about how the church is getting on in Thessalonica!

The way Paul and his friends undertook leadership can be glimpsed throughout the text. As we’ll explore in this session’s passage, for them, good Christian leadership was not merely ‘being nice’ – it was deeply sacrificial and included urging, encouraging, truth-speaking, praying, admonishing and communicating affection. Undeniably, the overriding goal was the spiritual development of others, above tasks or the growth of profile.

READ

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

DISCUSS

What qualities do you look for in a leader?

What insights about Paul’s leadership can you glean for this? (Passion, emphases, priorities, etc.)

How would you describe the way Paul regards the Thessalonians in your own words?

What, that is in this passage, do you see other leaders do?

How is the leadership demonstrated in this passage a) similar and b) different from what the world around us often tells us about good leadership?

Do you ‘glory’ in how other people are doing in their faith? Why or why not? How does this mindset about the people you are in a spiritual family with challenge you?

TRY OUT

- Are you aware of anyone who's faith is in need of strengthening and encouraging? Decide on some specific steps to take to imitate Timothy's ministry shown in this passage.
- We may not feel we have leadership gifts, but we all can embody the characteristics demonstrated in Paul, Silas and Timothy's leadership. We are all called to use our gifts to serve others, so a next step may be exploring your spiritual gifts. Reflect on what are they? Where are the opportunities to put them to use to encourage and strengthen others? If helpful, read through the definitions of gifts given to the church and complete the Spiritual Gifts Assessment at maybridge.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/06/Spiritual_Gifts_List-Assessment.pdf



PRAY

- Pray for each other – use Paul's words 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 as a guide.
- Pray for our church and those in leadership: that our leaders may grow in wisdom and in likeness of Jesus.

REFLECT

You may like to play a worship song to help you reflect and invite The Holy Spirit to guide all aspects of your life towards loving God and others

Hymn of the Holy Spirit – Pat Barrett

youtu.be/ioIH1Wx3MkE?si=gupak5qiYfFmPdmj



PART 6: RELATIONSHIPS

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12



SHARE

Who are the most important people in your life? Why and what do those relationships look like?

INTRODUCTION

Healthy church culture is often about the things that are not immediately obvious – what we do sexually, how our personal desires are sanctified and how we love others in subtle or less obvious ways – these matter enormously to the health of a church.

As we unpack and discuss the challenging topic of relationships and sexual behaviour, we do so remembering that because of the cross, *we get to swap sexual histories with Jesus*. He gets all our lust, our selfish extra-marital sex, our affairs, our abuse, our addictions, our sexual judgementalism of others. We get His sexual history – self-sacrificial, pure, treating every other person as a human not an object, perfect sexual integrity. All of that is transferred to us in the sight of God. It's not just abstract theology, this is what God actually does for us.

In this section of 1 Thessalonians, Paul urges believers to *'live in order to please God'* because God's will is for His Church to be sanctified and set apart. Paul's concern is that followers

of Jesus avoid sexual immorality because what we do sexually shapes who we are and it shapes how we represent Jesus to the world.

Rod Dreher writes: *'Christianity worked a cultural revolution, restraining and channelling male eros (sexual desire) elevating the status of both women and the human body, and infusing marriage – and sexuality – with love.'*

SHARE

What images or people come to mind when you think about living a holy life and why? (You may think of a monk or nun, a person living simply, someone lacking passion and no fun?)

READ

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

DISCUSS

What vision for human relationships does Paul have here? Put it in to your own words.

Why does our sexual behaviour affect not only ourselves, but others around us?

It is clear in the text that God's will is for us to be sanctified. What does that mean? Do you think of your life as a journey towards sanctification? Why or why not?

How can we make an openness about our desires (sexual or otherwise) with

one another a normal part of church life? What benefits would this have? When we think about practically loving other people, there might be certain things that spring to mind. This passage shows us some things that may be less obvious. But are there other ways to practically love that the church forgets or ignores? Are there ways in which others could love you better than they may not be aware of?

PRAY

- Spend some time praying that our church culture would reflect more of the values in this passage.
- Genuine faith and spiritual maturity is also shown by our love for God and for others. Galatians 5:6 also says: *What is important is faith expressing itself in love* [NLT]. Jesus even said that our love for others will be the marker that distinguishes us as his disciples [John 13:35 NIV]. Pray you may grow in love of God and of others – that our love and relationships with one another at Maybridge to powerfully represent Jesus our community.

TRY OUT

- Sexual sin seems to be a universal problem. In view of this and what we have read in 1 Thessalonians, spend some time reflecting on:

- a) Any changes or decisions you may need to make about the kind of content you are influenced by – movies, books, social media, TV etc., that are part of your daily life?
- b) Are there any activities prompting lust you need to deal with?

- In James 5:16 we read, '*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*' Find someone you trust who will both love and accept you, and you can name and confess your sin, shame or secret to. This could be a friend, church member, mentor or councillor. Arrange a place to meet that is private enough for you to feel safe and at peace and let them speak Jesus' forgiveness over you.

REFLECT

Read Psalm 51, a passage or play a song that helps you pray and reflect on the theme of 'living for God' and focus on become holy and set apart.

Build my Life – Housefires

[youtu.be/QZw4_8_zCBE?
si=BN58Z3-FVYWgPgX8](https://youtu.be/QZw4_8_zCBE?si=BN58Z3-FVYWgPgX8)



Pure – Abbie Gamboa

[youtu.be/poc29krDRbQ?
si=oLBVC_h8SIkvCQxl](https://youtu.be/poc29krDRbQ?si=oLBVC_h8SIkvCQxl)



PART 7: PURPOSE

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-5:11



INTRODUCTION

American scholar and pastor Ligon Duncan says: *'The fact is that you cannot live well if you are not living in light of Jesus' return.'*

This passage of 1 Thessalonians presents a warning about *'the day of the Lord'* and Paul discusses how the day will come, its impact and how we are to live and encourage one another in light of Jesus' return.

SHARE

Do you ever think about Jesus coming back? What do you imagine it will be like?

READ

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

DISCUSS

What does Paul 1) say will happen and 2) say we need to do about it, in your own words?

Does the thought of death or the return of Jesus (whichever is first) scare you? What do you think this passage says to our fears?

How does having an 'eternal perspective' change small every day decisions? Give some examples!

Jesus Himself spoke about the "thief in the night" in Matthew 24:42-44. How does He say we should live in light of our ignorance about when He will come?

QUOTE

The importance of this passage is summarised well by a quote from Michael Holmes: *'A proper understanding and awareness of the return of Jesus will energise us in the present, as we comfort and encourage one another in the midst of difficult circumstances, confident in the hope of a salvation grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus.'*

DISCUSS

Being ruthlessly practical: how are individual Christians – and whole churches – supposed to live differently in light of Jesus' coming return? What does it look like to be *'awake and sober'*?

Based on this passage, and anything else we've seen in 1 Thessalonians, what is the purpose of the church? Has your view changed or modified at all?

PRAY

- Pray for the needs of the people in the group. Consider how living in the light of Jesus' return may affect how you pray, comfort and encourage those in the midst of difficult circumstances.

TRY OUT

- What will being alert and self-controlled look like in your life this week? Can you think of some practical ways in which you need to be alert?
- Discuss what practical steps we can take to 'put on' faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. Be creative. You may find it helpful to create a list of guidelines to try during the week. You can share your results at the beginning of the next meeting.

PART 8: HABITS

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-28



SHARE

What habits do you keep in your daily and weekly life? How might they be shaping you?

INTRODUCTION

If Christians were to cultivate a spiritual life characterised by finding regular joys in God's provision, praying through the trivial rhythms of each day and remaining thankful in times of plenty and times of little, we would be relentless good news to a world beset with anxiety, greed and almost obsessive self-focus. More than that; we would be formed into the sort of people God wants us to be.

This last passage contains some final instructions from Paul to the Thessalonian church on what they need to do to keep themselves holy. He gives a checklist of ways to live life well, which is designed to cultivate healthy individuals within a healthy church. Let's explore these together.

READ

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

DISCUSS

What stand out to you? Surprises you? Challenges you?

What habits have you engaged with in your spiritual journey?

Which of the habits and characteristics that Paul raises most resonate with you right now and why?

How are we to understand 1) our role and 2) God's role in the process of becoming holy/sanctification?

TRY OUT

- Commit to try or grow in a habit (spiritual discipline) moving forward. Arrange a time to catch up with a group member or friend in a month or so to catch up and see how you are getting on.
- Beginning or strengthening spiritual disciplines like prayer or reading scripture may mean ceasing some things in order to embrace habits that give life. Create time to reflect on what comes to mind for you when you think about your own spiritual journey.

REVIEW & DISCUS 1 THESSALONIANS

Spend on reviewing the whole of 1 Thessalonians and discuss:

Based on what you've encountered through 1 Thessalonians, what IS church, in your own words? Has your view changed or modified at all?

What does our church need to grow in *culturally*? How can this be achieved?

QUOTE

Ray Ortlund & Sam Allberry write: *'I'm not willing to pray and suffer and labour and give my life to maintain an ecclesiastical institution that isn't beautiful. But I am willing to labour and suffer and pray for and give my life to the creation of a beautiful church that can astonish this generation. Sign me up for that. That's Gospel culture'.*

DISCUSS

What do to make of this quote?

How does a church become beautiful?

Do you want to be a part of a church like this, and how?

PRAY

- Pray for the needs of the people in the group.
- Pray for the church, that we would each play a part *'the creation of a beautiful church that can astonish this generation'*.



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