

KEEP ON

TRUSTING, LOVING & HOPING

A SERIES IN 1 THESSALONIANS

GROUP GUIDE

2020 has been unusual and uncertain. Due to lockdown, we have been separated/isolated from one another as a church family: *“being separated from you for a short time”* (1 Thess. 2:17). As we reach the end of 2020, it should not surprise us that some of us might feel *“idle”* (disorderly and disruptive), *“disheartened”* (ready to give up) and *“weak”* (physically, emotionally and spiritually) (1 Thess. 5:14). 2020 has also been a year where some of our brothers and sisters in Jesus who have *“fallen asleep”* (1 Thess. 4:14). We are grieving in this time. Many of us have suffered.

As we consider these things, we need to ask ourselves: “What will motivate us to keep going?” Specifically, to keep walking with Jesus and one another in love, growing in our faith and waiting in hope. What will help us, “encourage one another” to keep going in this time (1 Thess. 4:18)? This is where 1 Thessalonians is so relevant and helpful.

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to a young and suffering church. Paul’s time in Thessalonica was abruptly ended due to persecution (cf. Acts 17:1-9). Although Paul desired to return, he was unable to. Isolated from the church, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to a) give the young and suffering church assurance in the Gospel and b) to show them how the Gospel impacts every aspect of life. Throughout the letter, Paul will encourage the church to keep going with Jesus; reminding them of God’s faithfulness, power and love (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4; 3:13; 5:23-24). And hopefully, as we work through this letter together, we will also be encouraged to keep on going in love, growing in faith and waiting in hope.

One of the things you will pick up in 1 Thessalonians is that Paul never ministered or served alone, but within a team (*Silas and Timothy* being mentioned in 1:1). Paul will constantly speak of “us”. In the same way, the Leaders Guide and Group guide has been a team effort; God’s people lovingly using their gifts to serve you. I praise God for Carla Stephenson, Tim Gertzen and Jon Morrison who have joined me in preparing studies and writing articles. I praise God for Gill Leggat, using her literary gifts to edit the studies. I praise God for Sally Cronje and Carl Gordon for designing the Group Guide and artwork. I praise God for the admin team, providing support. I praise God for every Fellowship Group Leader who prepares and facilitates our groups.

Collectively, we have one goal: *“so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4:12-13).

In Christ with much affection,

Carel
 Phil. 1:21

Sermon Notes for 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10



1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

The Resounding Noise of a Genuine Church

STUDY 1

1. Make a list of the traits that you think characterize a genuine church. Which of these traits would be the least obvious? How would you determine whether these traits are true of a local church?



Investigating

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1. Paul tells the Thessalonians that he constantly thanks God for them. What specifically does he thank God for in 1:2-3?
2. What does Paul celebrate in 1:4? How does he 'know' that he can celebrate this? (1:5)
3. Look over the sequence of events in verses 4-8. What happens? And who plays a role in each event?

Verse	Who?	Event?	Who?
1:4	God		
1:5		Brought the Gospel in power and full assurance	To the Thessalonians
1:5	Paul and his team	Lived among them for their benefit	
1:6		Became imitators of...	
1:6	The Thessalonians		From the Holy Spirit
1:7			To all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia
1:7		The Word of the Lord rang out!	

4. What three things did people talk about when they spoke about the kind of reception which the Thessalonians gave Paul? (1:9-10)
5. How does Paul's description of God contrast with the idols the Thessalonians worshipped before receiving the Gospel? (1:9)



Thinking & Living

1. What sort of things are you thankful for in our church? How does this compare to the things that Paul is thankful for in this first part of 1 Thessalonians?
2. How obvious are the traits of faith, love and hope in a church? In what ways does Paul's pairing of each of these traits with an outward manifestation make it easier to determine whether these traits are present?
3. What has the impact of the Gospel been on your life? How would you differentiate between its coming in word only, and coming in power?
4. What do you think it means for 'the word of the Lord' to ring out? Does it 'ring out' from St Peters? What about from your Fellowship Group?
5. The report Paul hears from others (about the Thessalonians' repentance and faith) makes it clear to him that these Christians are the real deal.
 - a) Could this report be made about your own personal life?
 - b) Siimilarly, do you think this report could be made about St Peters?

Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

- 1.** Thank God that He has chosen us and for the coming of the Gospel to Fish Hoek.
- 2.** Pray that 'the word of the Lord' would 'ring out' from St Peters Fish Hoek into our neighbouring communities.
- 3.** Pray that God will help you to turn from idols to serve him and to wait for our saviour, Jesus.
- 4.** Pray for our sister church, uBabalo neThemba, in Masiphumelele. Pray that these marks of a genuine church would be true for our brothers and sisters there too: that their community would be marked by faith and love and hope.
- 5.** Pray for the 'Deep South'. Pray that the Gospel might ring out from faithful churches in the region and transform people's hearts and lives.
- 6.** Pray for Jon Morrison, our missions support team, and our missions partners as they seek opportunities to take the gospel to strategic locations far afield. Pray for further opportunities. Pray also that the message which our existing partners are proclaiming is received with joy.



Sermon Notes for 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16



1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

The Beginnings of a Genuine Church

The Thessalonians experienced real evangelism and discipleship and responded rightly

STUDY 2

1. What do you think are some of the ways you can effectively share the gospel? What do you expect when you share the gospel?



Investigating

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (How we came)

1. Why do you think Paul includes this section in this letter?
2. In v. 4, what do they describe as their motivation for sharing the gospel so boldly?
3. Contrast how the team came vs. how they did not come.

How they did not come (Vv.3-6) <i>List the things they were careful not to do</i>	How they came (Vv. 2, 7-12) <i>List the things they did do</i>

4. Looking at the things they did (vv.2, 7-12), is there a common theme or repeated idea?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 (How you received)

5. According to v. 13, how did the Thessalonians respond to Paul and company?
6. How did the word of God work itself out in the lives of the Thessalonians in v. 14?
7. How does the Thessalonians' response contrast the response of the Jews in vv. 14b-16?



Thinking & Living

1. In summary **how** then, did Paul and the team share the gospel with the Thessalonians (vv. 2-12)?
2. How do you think this passage might be a corrective to using only “hit-and-run” evangelism?
3. Paul uses strong family language in this passage to describe how they disciplined. How do you think that should impact how we relate to one another...
 - At home in your family?
 - With your church family (on a Sunday and Fellowship Group)?
 - Where you serve at St. Peters?
4. What are some of the things you can change to help you share the gospel through living an upright life with others?
5. According to vv. 13-16 what can we expect will be the results of sharing the gospel through our very lives with others?
6. Share with your group some people you would like to start intentionally praying for and sharing your life with.
7. Based on this passage what are some of the things you should pray for?
8. How does the following testimony reflect on what you have just learned?

Coming to know the gospel was a journey for me. It was not through one person but very much through the family of God. Growing up in a Christian home and learning scripture by heart under the caring guidance of my parents is something I would never take for granted. But when I went to a missionary boarding school, things began to become much more real for me. As I was not under the roof of my parents' home, I had to begin to think of the gospel more personally than I had before. I was surrounded by other Christians who were constantly sharing their faith with me as we did life together. I have had numerous women in my life who were mother figures to me at different seasons in life. They paid special attention to share the gospel by their way of life. They invited me to be part of their lives. That is why on Mother's Day I have many “spiritual” moms I connect with as well. The body of Christ cared for me - **Carla Stephenson**

Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

- 1.** Pray that as St Peter's Church we would be encouraged to share the gospel through the life of our community.
- 2.** Pray that God would empower you to share the gospel with others through your relationships.
- 3.** We have all been separated (due to COVID) from those with whom we would normally share our lives. Pray that God would rebuild and strengthen relationships across our Church. Pray also that God would help us as a Church to reach out to those isolated at this time.
- 4.** Pray for the Children's ministries at St Peters. Pray (1) that our leaders would effectively teach and love them and (2) that our children would be saved by the work of the Word of God.
- 5.** Greg and Carol Philipps and their two daughters Hannah and Ruth are our Missions Partners. Pray for them as a family as Greg teaches and is the Academic Registrar for Mukhanyo Theological College. His aim is to train and empower African Theologians. Pray that God would use their family in raising up more workers for our continent and country.
- 6.** Give thanks that our government is allowing us to worship freely and pray that we as Christians would be salt and light in our context, making the most of the freedom we have.
- 7.** Pray for your fellowship group collectively and for any specific prayer points.



Sermon Notes on 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13



1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

The Love of a Genuine Church

The Thessalonians are still on track and they must keep going!

STUDY 3

1. What are some of the things that bring joy for you in the Christian life?



Investigating

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

1. How do we know that Paul and the team loved the Thessalonian church from 2:17-20?
2. What are some of the reasons that Paul mentions for sending Timothy in 3:1-5?
3. What report does Timothy bring back of the Thessalonians (3:6)?
4. How do Paul and company feel about this news in 3:7-8?
5. What are Paul's desires for the Thessalonians, as he looks to the future (3:9-13).
6. Who is Paul relying on to make these things happen? Pick out some verses, throughout this section, which make this clear.



Thinking & Living

1. What things have you learnt about Paul and his approach to ministry in this section?
2. Share with your group one thing about God that has really made an impression on you, from this section.
3. What things have you learnt about Christian love in this section?
4. How could you know that your Fellowship Group is on track, despite the hindrance of the pandemic policies, according to this section of text?
5. When lockdown is lifted and Church is reopened, what should we as a Church be focused on? How could we do this?
6. How can we take “abounding in love” seriously in our own lives this week and hereafter?
7. How can we make sure that we are not depending on ourselves for our own growth in love but depending on the Lord?

* If you are able to, watch the Bible Project’s Word Study video on Agape - “Love” which is the word used here.
Link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=slyevQ1LW7A

Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

- 1.** Pray for your group, that God would grow your love for each other and grow your love for Him.
- 2.** As we are experiencing a particularly challenging time with the pandemic and in processing racial issues, many Christians (globally and locally) have different opinions and approaches. Please pray earnestly that God would give us love for each other and grace to listen carefully so that we would be united in Him.
- 3.** Please keep on praying for St Peter's Church. Pray that God would guide the leadership and council in their decisions. Pray for all our members to be encouraged to keep on going in their ministry, growing in their faith and waiting for our Lord Jesus.
- 4.** Please pray for uBabalo neThemba Church – our sister Church. Pray for the members of the leadership of the Church, for Bheki and Thembi, in all their decisions. Pray for their members to be encouraged to keep on going in their ministry, growing in their faith and waiting for our Lord Jesus.
- 5.** Pray for Eugene and Dawn Reyneke who are based in Mozambique. Ask God to strengthen them as they lead the missionary team based there. Pray that as they support other missionaries, the ministries that flow forth from the team would be effective. Pray that God would use Eugene and Dawn's own ministries of training and teaching others powerfully for His name. Pray that the report we receive from them is encouraging and that they would see those they serve growing in faith and love despite the opposition they face.



Sermon Notes on 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12



1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

“Put more in!”

STUDY 4

1. Has St Peters Fish Hoek ‘made it’ as a church? Have you ‘made it’ as a Christian? How will we know when we have ‘made it’?



Investigating

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

1. Paul and his companions are deeply encouraged by the Thessalonians. However, they do make a further exhortation to the Thessalonians. What is this request and why does Paul make it? (4:1-3a)
2. Look at verses 3-8. In what general area of living, does Paul urge the Thessalonians to “do even more”?
3. Look for and list the exhortations Paul gives in v.3-8 as well as the reasons he gives for these exhortations:

Verse	Exhortation	Reason
4:3		
4:4-5		
4:6-7		

4. Look at verses 9-12. What general area of living does Paul want the Thessalonians to think about doing ‘more’ in here?
5. As he makes this request, what does Paul acknowledge in verses 9 and 10?
6. How do the instructions in verse 11 relate to loving one another? How does the “so that” in verse 12 help us in figuring this out?



Thinking & Living

1. Consider what we have learnt about the spiritual state of the Thessalonian church, as well as what Paul acknowledges in 4:1 and 4:9-10. Does Paul's request in this passage surprise you? Why or why not?
2. How will knowing that our sanctification '*pleases God*' (4:1), is '*God's will*' (4:3), is what we have been '*called to*' (4:7) and is what we have been '*taught by God*' (4:9) be an encouragement to '*put more in*'?
3. Have you, personally, been seeking to 'do more and more' when it comes to your holiness? In which areas of your life has this been going well? Which areas could you make a more conscious effort in?
4. What is one actionable step that you can take this week to a.) keep further away from sexual immorality and b.) seek to love someone whom you already love even more?

Here are some specific areas you might like to think about:

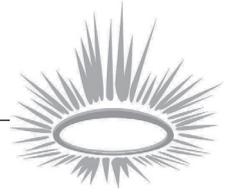
- a. Your mind and conduct at the Gym
- b. Church services on a Sunday
- c. Your internet usage or Netflix choices
- d. Your immediate family

Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

- 1.** Pray for yourself. Pray that God will be with you as you seek to 'put more in' for your sanctification and his glory. Pray that he will make you aware of areas in your life where you can do this.
- 2.** Pray for our Fellowship Groups. Pray that they will be a place where we can encourage one another to grow more and more in holiness.
- 3.** Pray for St Peters Fish Hoek. Pray that we would not be a church that is satisfied with our current holiness but that we would be a community eager to grow more and more into the likeness of Christ. Pray that this would be our conviction and that we would do this in practice.
- 4.** Pray for Katleho and Delight Meslane, our missions partners at St Thomas Church in Heideveld. Pray that God would strengthen them and give them wisdom as they encourage our brothers and sister in Heideveld to grow in holiness.
- 5.** Pray for the issue of Gender-Based Violence in our country. Thank God that he is an 'avenger of all offences' (4:6). Pray for Government, NGO's and local churches as they seek to bring about change in their communities.



'Sanctification'



"For this is God's will, your sanctification..."

– 1 Thessalonians 4:3a

For many, the concepts of 'conversion', 'coming to faith' or even 'being born again' are familiar ones. This sort of language is often used by Christians to describe recognising Jesus as Lord of all. It is by submitting to this Lordship that Christians are saved from God's righteous punishment of sin. On the other hand, the language of 'sanctification' may be more unfamiliar. So, in this brief article we will explore some of the main ideas in the Bible regarding 'sanctification'.

SANCTIFICATION: BE WHO YOU ARE

When a person begins to believe in Jesus, he/she receives the status of an adopted child of God. The Apostle John puts it like this: *"But to all who did receive him [Jesus], he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name"* (John 1:12).

In his first epistle John goes on to explain: *"See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children – and we are! ...Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope purifies himself as he is pure."* (1 John 3:1-3)

When we put our hope in Jesus Christ, we immediately receive the status of being pure and blameless children of God the Father. In this way, we are made holy as our Father is holy (cf. Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

However, as any Christian knows, our lives do not always reflect our status.

Like Paul, we *'discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. For in my inner self I delight in God's law, but I see a different law in parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body'* (Romans 7:21-22). It is easy to despair at this frustrating disconnect! Paul himself asked: *'Who will rescue me from this body of death?'* The answer he found was *'God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!'* (Romans 7:24-25).

Jesus' atoning death on the cross has paid for the full cost of our sin. In his death we are fully justified and there remains *'no condemnation for those in Jesus Christ'* (Romans 8:1). Yet, Jesus' death did more even than achieve

justification and adoption for us: *“His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness”* (2 Peter 1:3).

The power of the cross has not only given us our status as adopted children; but it is also working in our lives to renew and transform us daily! Through this power the Spirit works to begin to resemble that status which Jesus achieved for us on the cross.

SANCTIFICATION: GOD’S WILL

Knowing these Gospel truths, Paul urges the church in Thessalonica to not only continue living out their faith – but also to do this even more. Paul is crystal clear that the Thessalonians have salvation in Jesus (1 Thess. 5:9). Yet, he knows that this salvation consists of resurrected life not only for the dead but also for the living (1 Thess. 5:10b)!

He wants the Thessalonians to know that God didn’t call them *‘to impurity but to live in holiness’* (1 Thess. 4:7). God’s will is not only to make His chosen people adopted in status. His will is that they also grow to be the children of God he has already made them. Sanctification, then, is this ongoing transformation from a life of sin, lived for self - to a life of holiness, lived to please God.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.35) describes it like this:

Q: What is Sanctification?

A: The work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

SANCTIFICATION: WE WILL BE LIKE HIM

When, then, will this process of becoming like him be complete? The final destination of sanctification, so to speak, is glory. The late Christian Theologian J.I. Packer described sanctification as the *“process of glorification begun”*. This is God’s great plan, which all creation eagerly anticipates: creation, *“set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children.”*

It is this glory that we will all share when we inherit the kingdom of God. We will be physically transformed so that our flesh, as well as our spirit, match our status: children of God. And at Jesus’ return, whether we are dead or living we will finally, and fully, attain this.

‘In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, we will all be changed. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.’ (1 Corinthians 15:52)

Sermon Notes on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18



1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Those who have fallen asleep

STUDY 5

1. What do you believe will happen to you at the second coming of Jesus? I.e. What will happen if you are alive? What will happen if you have died already? How sure are you?

Investigating

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 - Resurrection Hope

1. What do you think was “lacking” in the church’s faith when it came to death and the return of Jesus?
2. What is the difference between Christians and “*the rest of mankind*” when it comes to death (v. 13)? Why is that the case (Vv. 14-15)?
3. What two formal statements or ‘Creeds’ can you see in v. 14 (A Creed is a belief statement of the Christian faith)?
4. Is there any difference (in terms of where they will ultimately be) between those who have died, and those who are still alive, when Jesus returns? (V. 15)

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 - The Return of Jesus

1. What happens to the following 3 characters in these verses? (vv. 16-18)

Jesus	Those who die before His return	Those who die after He returns

2. What assurance does Paul offer those who are living when Jesus returns in v. 17?
3. What similarities are there between those who have died and those who are still alive when Jesus returns v. 17?
4. What does Paul command believers to do in v. 18?



Thinking & Living

1. Do you agree with the creeds in v. 14? How does this challenge your own attitude towards death?
2. How can you be sure about what will happen to you at the return of Jesus?
3. How does this passage help you encourage other Christians:
4. Who are fearful of death?
5. Who are mourning the loss of a loved one?
6. In your own words how would you explain to a non-Christian what we believe will happen at the second coming of Jesus?
7. We all struggle with a certain amount of fear towards the unknown - How can you live a life of certainty and hope in the face of the Christ's second coming?

Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

- 1.** Pray for your own heart to be changed by the assurance Scripture gives you in the face of death and the second coming.

- 2.** Pray that the members of St Peters Church might live lives of faith, love and hope in the wider community of the Fish Hoek valley.

- 3.** Please pray for...
 - Those who lost loved ones at St Peters recently.

 - Christians who fear death. May they have assurance of their own bodily resurrection at the return of Jesus.

 - Unbelievers in our valley, may come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through our ministries at St Peters Church.

 - Our Mission partners would share the hope they have in Christ in their specific ministry contexts.

 - The leaders of South Africa would experience assurance in Christ, as they serve our country.

 - That we would encourage one another all the more as we see “the day approaching”



Christian View of the Afterlife



Although passages like 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 seem very clear on the future resurrection (when Jesus returns), not much is said about (what is known as) the “intermediate state” - the “intermediate state” being between when a person dies and Jesus’ returns. So, we ask: “What happens when I die before Jesus returns?” In this article we will try to bring some clarity to this...

SPECULATIONS ON THE AFTERLIFE...

Purgatory

Although some church fathers might have hinted at it, the term and idea of purgatory originated in the 5th Century with Saint Augustine... Nevertheless, in his work “Enchiridion” Augustine was only speculating about the possibility of a type of place called purgatory... He writes, “It is a matter that may be inquired into, and either ascertained or left doubtful, whether some believers shall pass through a kind of purgatorial fire, and in proportion as they have loved with more or less devotion the goods that perish, be less or more quickly delivered from it” (Enchiridion, 69). Subsequent generations took Augustine’s words as being a matter of fact and slowly solidified the concept of purgatory.

As interesting as this doctrine/teaching might seem (and even though some movies and fantasy novels indulge in this idea) there is one major problem with it... Purgatory is not mentioned in the Bible. When considering the biblical evidence for the idea of Purgatory, Roman Catholic R.J. Bastion concludes, “In the final analysis, the Catholic doctrine on purgatory is based on tradition, not Scripture”.

Contrary to the teachings of purgatory, Jesus told the thief on the Cross (a criminal that placed his trust in Jesus) that after his death, “today (not after thousands of years of purification) you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:43), which 1 Cor. 12:3 describes as the place of God’s immediate presence (heaven). Paul states in Phil. 1:23 that after death he will immediately, “depart and be with Christ”. In 2 Cor. 5:6-8, Paul only describes two modes of existence: one that is physically here on earth (in the body - this life) and another that is spiritual with God in heaven (away from the body - the Afterlife): “We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord... we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Biblically, there is no interim place (between death and heaven) called purgatory.

Soul Sleep

The basic idea behind this view (which has been occasionally taught by some groups within Christian history) is the belief that when a person dies, he/she goes into a state of unconsciousness, but will awake (become conscious) when Jesus returns, being raised from the dead. One of the reasons this view had some traction is due to the many references in Scripture that refer to death as “sleep” or “falling asleep”. For example, 1 Thess. 4:14 describes the death of Christians this way: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

Nevertheless, what is often neglected in this reading is that the reference to falling “asleep” is used as a metaphorical expression to indicate that death, for the Christian, is temporary (like sleep). It is not permanent or something to fear. Like sleep, death has no permanent hold on the Christian. Yet, the primary reason why we reject the idea of soul sleep is that the Bible clearly reveals that when a Christian dies, he/she will consciously be with God in His presence. For example, in Hebrews 12:22-24, the author makes it clear that, “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (who have died) are part of the “joyful assembly” in God’s presence. Similarly, the final book of the Bible, Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:9-10 clearly shows the souls or spirits of those who have died before God’s throne, joyfully worshipping Him (speaking to God and God answering them).

Soul Wandering/souls being earthbound

This view has been popularized by movies like *Paranormal Activity*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, weekly shows like *Crossing Over*, yearly celebrations like Halloween or children’s stories like *Casper the Friendly Ghost*. It also resonates with traditional beliefs of ancestral spirits within Africa (and parts of Asia). The basic idea is that the soul/spirit of a human being can wander on the earth or be “earthbound” or can be contacted via an intermediary (a specialist or spirit medium). Biblically, while Israel wandered the wilderness in Exodus-Deuteronomy the surrounding nations believed and practised this (a belief and practice forbidden by God in Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10-12).

Within the Bible, there are only two instances where a spirit from the dead appears and communicates in some form with the living. That is the prophet Samuel with Saul in 1 Sam 28 and Moses and Elijah appearing before Jesus at His Transfiguration (Mk. 9:4). Nevertheless, both these instances are unique within the larger story of the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible overwhelmingly affirms that once we die we immediately go to our eternal destination (as we saw in Jesus’ words to the thief in Luke’s Gospel, Paul’s words in 2 Cor. 5:6-8 and Phil. 1:23). This is also the sense you get from Jesus’ parable regarding Lazarus and the rich man in Lk. 16:19-31 (one going to paradise, the other to hell). In the parable, no permission is granted for the dead to return to the living.

WHAT THE BIBLE REVEALS ABOUT THE AFTERLIFE...

The Intermediate State... The Cross and the Tomb...

When a Christian dies, the Bible makes it clear that the death of a Christian is not punishment for sin, but part of the final outcome of living in a Fallen World (subject to the penalty of death since Genesis 3). God has not yet renewed His Creation; it is still, “subject to futility... and bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:21-23) and we with creation experience this. In this present world, Christians experience ageing, illness, injuries and natural disasters. We too face physical death.

In fact, prior to Jesus’ return, it is one aspect of what it means to be united to Christ. As Jesus experienced death on the Cross, the separation of His body and soul, so too each Christian (united to Him by faith and the Holy Spirit) shares in Jesus’ suffering and death... Christians are “fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17). Paul describes this union to include Jesus’ death, his desire being that, “I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil. 3:10-11). For the Christian, being united with Jesus means that Jesus’ path becomes our path as well; we identify with every aspect of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension. He is our blueprint.

Consequently, when Jesus described His own death to be the moment that His spirit/soul would be in paradise, “today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43) those words were spoken of every Christian’s destiny after death as well. As Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:1-10: even if this “earthly home” (this present body) “is destroyed” we have the hope (like Jesus’ own resurrected body) of an “eternal house”. Yet, prior to that day (the resurrection of the dead), we are either “at home in the body... away from the Lord... or away from the body and at home with the Lord” (vv. 6-8). Similarly, in Phil. 1:21-25, Paul describes death in this life as “a gain” (not a loss), because through death, being “united in Jesus’ death” (Phil. 3:10-11), he will be “with Christ”; as he writes, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil. 1:23).

In a nutshell, when we die as Christians, we go to be with Jesus, in His presence... which we call heaven. The current heaven, is described as a place where we are in God’s immediate presence, overflowing with awe and joy, joining all of creation in joyous worship (you can read Revelation 4-5 to give you a glimpse into this present heaven).

Yet, this intermediate state, just like Jesus' body in the tomb (when His soul and body were separated), is not the end of the story... It is temporary. The overwhelming feeling within the New Testament is a longing for Jesus to return. Paul, while living in this "earthly body" (our present body subject to the Fallen world) writes in 2 Cor. 5:2, "In this tent (present body) we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling".

The Return of Jesus... Reunion and Glorification of body and soul

Jesus did not merely die. His body did not remain in the tomb. Jesus' soul did not remain in the intermediate state. The claim and historical eyewitness accounts testify, "He was raised on the third day" (1 Cor. 15:4). Jesus experienced the reunion of the body and the soul, the resurrection from the dead. Yet, more than that, He ascended in glory as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Phil. 2:11). By His resurrection, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead," (Col. 1:15), "the firstborn of the dead" (Rev. 1:5). He is the first of the New Creation.

This is the ultimate hope of the Christian: Just as we are united in Jesus' suffering and death, so will we be united in His resurrection and glorification. Jesus' resurrection is compared to the firstfruits of a harvest in 1 Cor. 15:20: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Jesus is the first of the harvest of the New Creation (the first sign of it) and all who trust in Him will be part of the final harvest, the resurrection of the dead unto eternal life when Jesus returns. "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

In a nutshell, when Jesus returns all His people will experience the reunion of the body and soul, a reunion that will be just as eternal and glorious as Jesus' own resurrection. We will be fully human again with no trace of this fallen world anymore... Or to put it in the language of where the Bible starts... We will be perfectly recreated, "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26-27; Rom. 8:29). This is the hope of the Gospel.

Sermon Notes on 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11



Times and Dates

STUDY 6

1. If someone asked you what will happen to you when Jesus returns how would you answer?



Investigating

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 - The day of the Lord

1. Why should the Thessalonians not be concerned with times and dates with regards to *"the day of the Lord"*?
2. What is Paul inferring when he says that *"...the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night?"* (v. 2)
3. Why will the *"Day of the Lord"* be a shock to non-Christians? (v. 3)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 - Darkness dispelled

1. What reason does Paul offer for the Thessalonians not to be surprised by the day of the Lord? (Vv. 4-5)
2. Paul makes a distinction between Christians (people of the light) and those in darkness (vv. 6-8). Using the table below list the contrasting characteristics of each group...

Characteristics of those in darkness	Characteristics of those in the light

4. How can the Thessalonians remain “sober”? (v. 8)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 - Living with Christ in life and in death

5. What reasons does Paul give for them to continue living by faith, hope and love (vv. 9-10)?
6. In response to vv. 9-10, what should the Thessalonian church be doing (v. 11)?



Thinking & Living

1. What feelings or emotions come up for you when you contemplate that the return of Christ could happen at any moment?
2. Do you feel ready to meet Jesus face to face? Why / Why not?
3. Paul calls the Thessalonians to be “self-controlled” to “put on faith, love, hope”? What could you do / or change this week to be alert to the coming of our Lord?
4. Considering this passage, how could you encourage and build up a Christian friend who has no assurance of salvation?

Read the little biography and consider how this reflects on what we have just looked at...

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885) was a politician, activist and philanthropist. Throughout his life, he advocated for the better care of the mentally unwell, the reform of labor laws in factories (improving working conditions of workers), abolishing the employment of boys as chimney sweeps, establishing schools for the poor and opposing the trade of opium in Asia.

For a time, he was the president of the Bible Society, the Evangelical Alliance and the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews. What motivated Anthony Ashley Cooper to do all of this? In his own words, "I do not think that in the last 40 years I have lived one conscious hour that was not influenced by our Lord's return". He was "awake and sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). His faith in Christ produced works of service. His love motivated his labors. His hope made him endure (1 Thess. 1:3). As C.S. Lewis put it, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next."

Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

- 1.** Pray for your own understanding of the assurance Christ offers you regarding the Second Coming.
- 2.** Pray that the sermon series in 1 Thessalonians at St Peters would encourage and prepare us as a church for the return of Jesus.
- 3.** Pray for those who struggle with assurance - may the Lord change their worries and anxiety to assurance and steadfastness.
- 4.** Pray that we would reach many un-churched and non-Christian's over our Christmas series at St Peters.
- 5.** Pray for our Mission partners - Explore GWC - Nevil Carrington; Ana A Yesu - Malawi; Cricket Meyer - Khayelitsha & Malawi; Rod & Glenda Thomas - OMF Japan; Katlego Meslane & Family - St Thomas' Church, Heideveld; Greg Phillips & Family - Mukhanyo Theological College PTA.
- 6.** Pray that the leaders and stewards of South Africa would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- 7.** Pray that you would continue to encourage and build one another up in your fellowship group.



The Second Coming



Today many people are uncertain about what the future holds. This is why zodiac signs, tarot reading, Palmists (those who read Palms), Psychics, fortunetellers and analysts (trying to project possible outcomes of the future) are of interest in our modern culture. People are constantly trying to figure out and know what will happen tomorrow. Due to the various current events (like Lockdown, economic downturn and global/local tensions), there are also those who see these as definitive signs of the end. Although we would like to know the future (especially our own personal future), the reality is that none of us know what will happen tomorrow (James 4:14). Even so, the Bible is not silent on the *future or end of all things*. There is the revealed certainty of the Second Coming of Jesus. To appreciate the Bible's teaching on the Return of Jesus, we will look at a series of questions...

1. WHAT IS THE SECOND COMING?

The New Testament affirms that we are currently living in the *"last days"* (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2). We are in the latter part of history as all things move towards, *"the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:20). It will be at this end (when the *"last days"* are finished) that Jesus will return in bodily form (Acts 1:11; Jn. 14:3).

2. WHEN WILL THE SECOND COMING HAPPEN?

Over the centuries since Jesus died, rose again and ascended, people have attempted to predict the moment of the second coming, even down to the exact hour. Scripture clearly tells believers we cannot, and should not try to, know when Jesus will return. It is at an *"unexpected hour"*. This is why Christians are told to *"...keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour"* (Matthew 25:13; cf. Matt. 24:44; Mk. 13:32). Beware of the person who claims to know dates and times, month or even year of Jesus' return, since this contradicts Jesus and the Apostles' words on the Second Coming (cf. 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10).

3. WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT WILL HAPPEN BEFORE THE SECOND COMING?

In the last days (the period in which we live since Acts 2), the Bible is clear regarding what needs to and will happen. Firstly, the Gospel will and must go out to all nations (Mk. 13:10; Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20). The last days is the age of God's people being ambassadors for King Jesus, calling the nations to repent and put their trust in Him as Lord and Savior.

Secondly, the age of Gospel witness will also be an age of tribulation. Jesus warned His disciples that there will be, *"Wars and rumours of wars...nation will rise against nation...kingdom against kingdom... earthquakes... famines... this is the beginning of birth-pangs"* (Mark 13:7 cf. Matthew 24:15; Luke 21:20-24). Like birth-pangs, the frequency of tribulation/distress might increase before the joyful moment of Jesus' return.

Tied to this, there will also be a counter-battle taking place. Although the *"Prince of this world"* (Satan) is defeated (cf. Jn. 12:31; Rev. 12:1ff), it does not imply that he will go out on a whimper. He will persist in trying to deceive the world and the church through falsehood (in the form of false teachers, prophets and Christs) (cf. Mk. 13:22; Acts 20:29; 2 Tim. 4:3-5; 2 Pet. 3:3; Rev. 2-3; 16:13) and motivate lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:1-10).

Thirdly, when the Second Coming occurs (and none of us exactly knows), we can be assured that God would have gathered all His people (Jews and Gentiles) through the Gospel witness that takes place during the last days (Rom. 10:12-11:32). Currently, the postponement of Jesus' return is exactly because God, being patient, is busy gathering in His people: *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* (2 Pet. 3:9).

4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN JESUS RETURNS?

When the "last days" are finished, Jesus will return to judge the world: *"See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."* (Jude 1:14-15; cf. Rev. 20:12ff). This judgment is final and eternal (Rev. 20:15; 21:8; Heb. 10:26-27; 2 Pet. 3:7). It will be the end of evil and all its consequences.

It will also be the renewal of all things: *“As you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness”* (2 Peter 3:12-13; cf. Rev. 21:1-8). It is at this point that God’s people will be resurrected (like Jesus) with a new and glorious body, fit for the new heaven and earth God is re-creating at Jesus’ return (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-58; Phil. 3:20-21). It is then that our salvation will be complete.

5. HOW SHOULD WE LIVE KNOWING JESUS IS COMING BACK?

Firstly, we have a clear mission to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20), so we should prioritise what Jesus wants us to prioritise in the last days: be a witness to all nations (Acts 1:8). Secondly, we are also called to pray. It is phenomenal to think that in Rev. 8:3-5, the prayers of God’s people influence/ play a part in the arrival of the second coming. Jesus taught us to pray, *“Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matt. 6:9-10). Although we don’t know the hour when Jesus will return, we can be assured that the return of Jesus will also be due to God the Father answering the prayers of His children.

Thirdly, we need to be ready. We should live today as people whose *“citizenship is in heaven”* (Phil. 3:20), becoming like the King of God’s Kingdom (as Paul calls the Philippian church in Phil. 2:1-13). Life today is about becoming like Jesus more and more (Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Cor. 3:18). This is how we can be ready for the return: live as a citizen of the world Jesus will usher in when He returns. This is part of our witness to the nations: to show our surrounding community the future God has envisioned in Jesus by how we live.

Sermon Notes on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15



1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

Life in God's Community Part 1

STUDY 7

1. What relationships are essential to building a healthy and united church?

Investigating

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15...

In vv. 12-15, Paul gives a series of commands regarding how the church should relate to/love a) its leaders (vv. 12-13), b) one another (v. 14) and c) the surrounding community (v. 15) ...

1. Leaders... (vv. 12-13)

List how the church should relate to its leaders...	List what leaders do (what makes them leaders?)	Why should the church relate to their leaders in this way?

2. One another... (v. 14)

What type of people are in the church?	How can we serve each one specifically?	How should we relate to everyone?

3. How should the church relate to the surrounding community? (v. 15)
4. In a sentence, how would you summarise the commands in vv. 12-15? (hint: 1 Thess. 4:9-10)



Thinking & Living

Thinking about leaders in the church (vv. 12-13)...

1. Society often demands “respect” based on position/title. How does v. 13 differ from this? What should define leadership in the church?
2. We also live in a society that is quite anti-authoritarian (sceptical of leaders and rebellious). Yet, how does vv. 12-13 challenge this mindset in church?
3. How do you think this passage helps you to show love to the leaders at St. Peters: For example, Fellowship Group Leaders, Sunday School/Youth Leaders, a ministry leader etc.?

Thinking about one another... (v. 14)

1. We live in a very consumeristic society (loyalty based on what we get from the relationship). How does v. 14 challenge this mindset?
2. Every church family (including St. Peters) has idle people (disorderly, undisciplined, loafers), timid people (easy to quit/give up) and weak people (in conviction, health or position). Which of these flaws / weaknesses do you sometimes see in yourself? How has v. 14 helped you respond to these flaws in others?
3. Helping someone else is not necessarily a one-time event but a journey. What is hard about journeying with someone on a particular problem? What do you think “be patient” looks like in such a journey?

Thinking about our surrounding community (v. 15) ...

1. How does “seek to do good to one another and to everyone” mirror or witness to the Gospel?

Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

- 1.** Pray for your church leaders ...
 - Pastors
 - Council
 - Children and Youth ministry leaders
 - Fellowship Group & Community Leaders (who oversee the Fellowship Groups)
 - Mercy Ministry leaders (who oversee various ministries)

- 2.** Think about brothers and sisters in church that you know who are idle, timid and weak (no need to mention names – God knows who you are thinking of). Pray for them. Pray that God would use you to admonish, encourage and help them.

- 3.** Pray for patience...
 - As we navigate through getting back to normal during COVID-19/Lockdown
 - As we disciple one another in the Gospel
 - As we share life and our struggles together
 - As we serve together in our various ministries

- 4.** Pray for our witness in the Valley. That every member of St. Peters would be known for seeking “good to one another and to everyone” around us.



Sermon Notes on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28



Thessalonians 5:16-28

Life in God's Community Part 2

STUDY 8

1. What relationships do you think we need in order to keep on going and growing in the Christian life? Why do you say that?

Investigating

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18...

1. What should our relationship with God look like?

What should we do?	When should we do it?	Why should we do it?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22...

The Church is the gathering of God's people indwelt by God's Spirit (symbolized by fire in the New Testament: cf. Acts 2:1-4), serving one another with the gifts God has given us (cf. 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 2:21-22; 4:11-16 - you can look these up in your own time)...

1. When the church gathered, what should they not do (v. 19)? What did that look like in the church in Thessalonica (v. 20)?
2. Rather than vv. 19-20, what should the church be doing (vv. 21-22)?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28...

The Thessalonian church was facing persecution (1:6; 2:14-16; 3:4), struggled in being holy/different from the surrounding community (4:1-8), lost loved ones to death (4:13) and had people who were idle, timid and weak (5:14)...

1. What final encouragement does Paul leave the church with? (vv. 23-24, 28)?
2. What does this encouragement say about the Christian walk?



Thinking & Living

1. What do you think Paul means by “always... without ceasing... in all circumstances” vv. 16-18)? Is there anything you would like to change in your life, in obedience to this verse? Share with the group and ask for prayer.
2. Joy and gratitude (always and in all circumstances) sounds impossible. Yet, Paul has already given a lot of reasons why this should be our attitude towards God. Let each person pick a passage suggested below and discuss why we should be joyful and grateful...
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 9-10
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24
3. Why do you think prayer should be prominent in our everyday life (v. 17, 25)? Notice who we are dependent on in the following passages...
 - 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24
4. All Christians have the Holy Spirit and all Christians are gifted by the Spirit for service. All Christians are warned not to quench the Spirit, but like Timothy, “*fan into flame the gift of God*” (2 Timothy 1:6) ...
 - What gifts (abilities) do you know you have?
 - How has vv. 19-22 challenged you to use your gifts in the service of God's people?
 - Why is it important, like with the gift of prophecy in v. 20, that all gifts should be tested (v. 21)?
5. Considering what has happened in 2020 (Lockdown, COVID-19, economic downturn, personal struggles, church not being able to meet), how can vv. 23-24 be an encouragement to you to...
 - Keep going as you consider the future?
 - Keep going in your personal Christian walk? (praying, rejoicing, being thankful and serving those around you?)
 - Keep going in caring for others around you?
6. As we finish 1 Thessalonians, share with the group 1 thing you learned/ have been reminded of in this letter that has been encouraging / challenging.

Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

1. Take time to express gratitude (thanksgiving) for what we have in Christ (consider what we have learned in 1 Thessalonians)
2. Praise God for His faithfulness that He will “*sanctify you completely*” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)
3. Pray for our church family... (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)
 - For a willingness to serve (using our gifts - not quenching the Spirit)
 - Discernment; that we would “test everything”
 - Keep going in striving for holiness
4. Pray for our mission partners (who serve God’s people and seek to make disciples of all nations) (see website for details)
5. Pray for the upcoming Christmas Season: that a) God’s people would be encouraged by our hope in Jesus and b) many who don’t know Christ would find hope in Him as well

