

October to December 2025

“The First Epistle to the Thessalonians”

by Rev Ko Lingkang

About the Author



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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1

1 THESSALONIANS 3

1 THESSALONIANS 1

“...and might perfect that which is
lacking in your faith?”

WHAT IS FIRST THESSALONIANS ALL ABOUT?

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is a warm and delightful epistle written by the Apostle Paul to a young church that he cared for dearly. Even though he could spend only three weeks at Thessalonica during his first visit, a vibrant and healthy church had sprung up and was then thriving. In writing to this fledgling church, Paul demonstrated a deep concern for their spiritual well-being. Throughout the epistle, his spiritual yearning for them was evidenced by his heartfelt prayers, exhortations and encouragements.

The epistle can be very broadly divided into two parts. The first three chapters are historical, while the final two are instructional.

In the first part, Paul wrote to encourage them amid the persecution that they were facing. He shared his thanksgiving for their faith and assured them that he had not forgotten about them. He shared some updates about his personal circumstances, explaining why he had been unable to visit and had sent Timothy in his place.

In the final two chapters, Paul dealt with a few topics that he felt were needful to help “*perfect that which is lacking in your faith*” (1 Thess 3:10). It ranged from Christian living issues to clarification over some matters pertaining to the Lord’s return.

As we delve deeply into this precious epistle over these three months, may our hearts be encouraged and our faith strengthened by the wonderful words of truth. Like Paul, let us pray that “*the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints*” (1 Thess 3:12).

THOUGHT: All of us, without exception, have aspects of our faith that are lacking, and we need the Lord to help us to grow in Him.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy grace and wisdom be with me as I study this epistle over these three months.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

1 THESSALONIANS 2:19-20

“...and so shall we ever
be with the Lord.”

UNTO THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

One interesting thing to note about 1 Thessalonians is that every chapter closes with a mention of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1 Thessalonians 1:10: “*And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*”

1 Thessalonians 2:19: “*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*”

1 Thessalonians 3:13: “*To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*”

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*”

1 Thessalonians 5:23: “*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

It is evident that the promise of the Lord's return was something that Paul wanted the Christians at Thessalonica to be very mindful of. Amid the troubles and persecution that they were facing, he exhorted them to draw strength from the hope and expectation of the victorious return of the Saviour.

Dear reader, is this your hope as well? Do you sincerely and earnestly look forward to the day when the Lord returns and calls us home to glory?

THOUGHT: How should the expectation of the Lord's return affect the way that I live each day on earth?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to live each day in light of Jesus' soon return.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3

ACTS 17:1-15

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-18

“...the word of God,
which effectually worketh
also in you that believe.”

A TESTIMONY OF TRUE FAITH

Thessalonica was the second city in Europe that Paul visited during his second missionary journey. He had gone over after answering the Macedonian call (Acts 16:9-10), understanding that it was the Lord's will for him to preach the Gospel there. After a brief stint at Philippi, where he was imprisoned, he was miraculously freed by an earthquake, and came to the city of Thessalonica.

There, Paul preached in the synagogue for just three Sabbath days before he had to flee the city because of a violent riot that had assembled against him and his team. There were some who believed, but the Jews who rejected the message of Christ incited “*certain lewd fellows of the baser sort*” (Acts 17:5) to hunt down Paul and his associates. When they failed to find them, the aggressive mob then turned on some new converts and made false accusations against them. Even after Paul fled to the neighbouring city of Berea, the Jews pursued and continued to stir up the people to oppose Paul. He had no choice but to relocate to Athens.

Despite such a tumultuous start and ongoing persecution, the church at Thessalonica thrived. Against all odds, they received the Word of God by faith, and it was effectually working in them. They suffered much at the hands of the Jews, yet their faith continued to grow. Such is the power of the Gospel, that although Paul was “*taken from you for a short time in presence*” (1 Thess 2:17), that did not hinder their faith, but instead spurred them on to find hope in the Lord. They even became a witnessing church, for from them “*sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad*” (1 Thess 1:8). Indeed, what a wonderful testimony of a true and living faith.

Dear reader, how has the Word of God worked in you? True believers will always be guided by God's truth and the working of His Holy Spirit, such that we will not be easily overwhelmed by adversity.

THOUGHT: True faith will always bring forth fruit.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou strengthen my faith and help me to trust in Thee no matter what adversities or troubles come my way.

A CHURCH IN GOD AND IN CHRIST

The epistle begins with Paul's greetings to the church of Thessalonica, describing them as being *“in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thess 1:1). While many may tend to gloss over this phrase, it is a rich and meaningful description of a healthy spiritual life that we would do well to meditate upon.

They were a young church that had experienced a rocky start, having been plagued by persecution from the very beginning. One would think that they would be a church filled with problems, teetering on the edge of collapse. They could have so easily become like the seed that fell into stony places in Jesus' parable (Matt 13:20-21) where, because of tribulation or persecution, they soon withered and became unfruitful.

Yet, the very opposite was true. Despite what was happening to them, they were highly commended by Paul as being an exemplary Gospel witness in the region (1 Thess 1:7-8). How was that possible? The answer lies in the fact that they were in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This means that as a church they were secure in God and in Christ. They had an intimate and abiding relationship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. They knew Christ well and enjoyed a very blessed fellowship and union with Him. They trusted in God and sought to obey His will in all things. This ensured that they could remain strong as a church despite the absence of Paul or any of the Apostles. Their hope was in the infallible God, not in any one person.

Oh, what a blessed thing it is if every believer can confidently say that he is in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ! Every believer ought to prioritise their walk with the Lord above all things, and then all other facets of their lives will fall into place. If we are in Christ, no trial or temptation can turn us away from God, for our hope and trust is always and only in Him!

THOUGHT: It is a most blessed privilege that believers can abide in Christ.

PRAYER: Father, help me to always find comfort and assurance in Thee.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 5

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-2

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-22

*"We give thanks to God
always for you all..."*

GIVING THANKS ALWAYS

Christians ought to be the most thankful people in the world. As children of God who have been so richly blessed by Him, praise and thanksgiving should come most naturally to us. Like the Apostle Paul, we should be giving thanks to God always for all things.

Paul was a man of prayer. In every epistle that he wrote, he never failed to share the prayers that he had for the church or individuals that he was writing to. God's testimony of Paul (soon after his salvation) was *"behold, he prayeth"* (Acts 9:11). In the final epistle that Paul wrote before his death, he shared *"that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day"* (2 Tim 1:3). All through his life, he was continually giving thanks to God, for he knew that all things are of God and are therefore thankworthy.

In like manner, he shared in 1 Thessalonians 1:2 that *"we give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers."* He was so thankful to learn of the spiritual progress of the saints in Thessalonica. He knew that it happened not because of man's efforts, neither did he try to take credit for it. He knew that it was all of God, and therefore all glory should be unto Him. Most naturally, he gave all thanks to God.

As believers, we too must always be quick to thank God for everything that we have in this life. We must always count our blessings, and remember that every good gift and every perfect gift comes from our loving heavenly Father. He delights in our worship and praise of Him, and so our prayers must always begin and end with thanksgiving to Him. We can never thank God too much. Such gratitude will go a long way in helping us to be thankful and contented people.

THOUGHT: When was the last time I truly expressed my thankfulness unto God for all that He has done for me?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be thankful always for all things.

WORK OF FAITH

There are three exemplary marks that Paul commended the Thessalonian Christians for: their work of faith, labour of love and patience of hope. This trio of graces succinctly describes a true believer, that they have faith, love and hope, and the work, labour and patience that come about because of it.

The *“work of faith”* (1 Thess 1:3) is the work which stems from one’s faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The focus here is on the initial act of faith which all Christians exercise when the grace of Christ works in their hearts to cause them to repent and turn towards God. Paul described this as the work that resulted from faith, for elsewhere in Ephesians 2:8, he explained salvation as *“for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”* Therefore, grace is what enables the believer to first have faith, to repent of his sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This outworking of one’s inward faith is manifested by the life that is converted and regenerated by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such true faith is not just an intellectual acceptance of a logical argument, but it is a life-changing shift that results in a life that is now lived for God. It completely changes one’s whole outlook and perspective towards life, whereby one *“turned to God from idols”* (1 Thess 1:9). This is the effect that faith will work in the life of any true believer. It is a transformation that ought to be readily witnessed by all around him. It is not, as James described it, a dead faith (James 2:17). It is a faith that will result in works, works that prove that faith is alive.

Why do we serve God? Not so that we can be saved, but BECAUSE we are saved. When we have true faith in Christ, our life must now be evidenced by the work of faith – of the change and repentance in our life that comes about because we now trust in a living Saviour. Our whole life changes, because we have faith.

THOUGHT: How has my life changed since I believed on the Lord Jesus Christ?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the work of faith that Thou hast wrought in my life.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7

1 THESSALONIANS 1:3

2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-15

*“For the love of Christ
constraineth us...”*

LABOUR OF LOVE

Following salvation, it is only natural the believer seeks to labour for the Lord. Throughout the epistle, Paul would describe the many ways in which the Thessalonian believers had been labouring for God, in their example and witness to the surrounding provinces (1 Thess 1), their sufferings because of their faith (1 Thess 2), their faith and charity, and concern for Paul (1 Thess 3) and their brotherly love for their fellow believers (1 Thess 4).

It is clear the common thread through these labours is the love demonstrated by them. In the phrase, *“labour of love”* (1 Thess 1:3), Paul linked these two ideas together, explaining that a believer’s labours are compelled or motivated by their love. Paul also shared with the Corinthian church that it was the love of Christ that constrained him in his service (2 Cor 5:14).

Compared to the previous word *“work”* (an act or deed done), which Paul used in conjunction with faith, the word *“labour,”* expressed the process of exertion and effort put in. Labour (Grk: *kopos*) conveys the sense of hard toil, suffering and sorrow. It speaks of an intense effort that may cause one to be troubled and emphasises the weariness which follows. Work (Grk: *ergon*) may be pleasant and stimulating, but labour implies toil that is strenuous and fatiguing.

This is the extent of service which every Christian must aspire towards. He must labour, motivated by love for Christ only, and not pride, vain glory or any other man-centred reasons. This love here is the agape, sacrificial, unconditional love which Christ demonstrated on the cross. It is the love that has been shed abroad in the hearts of all believers by the Holy Ghost (Rom 5:5). Bound by this love, we must endeavour to do the best that we can to live for Christ. It will not always be easy, but it is a commitment that we make, for we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

THOUGHT: What am I willing to do for the people that I love?

PRAYER: Father, cause my love for Thee never to grow dim.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8

1 THESSALONIANS 1:3

JAMES 5:7-11

*“Be patient therefore, brethren,
unto the coming of the Lord...”*

PATIENCE OF HOPE

American theologian Jonathan Edwards once wrote: “Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs!” That was the heartfelt prayer of a man who loved the Lord, and desired to have his affections set on things eternal and not on things of this earth. This is the *“patience of hope”* (1 Thess 1:3) that all believers ought to have.

This phrase points to the hope that we all share in the promised return of Christ, and because of that hope, we are all patiently looking forward to His return. Although the Thessalonians were a group of young believers, yet they already had the strong desire *“to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come”* (1 Thess 1:10).

The Greek word for patience carries the idea of remaining steadfast and unmoving under heavy affliction and stress. This was the condition the Thessalonian Christians faced. Paul acknowledged that they *“have suffered like things of your own countrymen”* (1 Thess 2:14), referring to persecutions that they faced at the hands of the Gentiles. Yet they continued to remain steadfast, and eagerly looking forward to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All this could be possible, because it was based only upon their true and earnest hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. They were confident and assured that the Christ in whom they put their faith and trust will certainly return one day, and their hope will be fulfilled.

All Christians should live with such a forward-looking mindset. We know that this world is not our home, and we are but pilgrims and sojourners waiting for the blessed hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. As James 5:8 also exhorts us: *“Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”*

THOUGHT: Do I need to be patient if I am not earnestly looking forward to an event?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou stamp eternity on my eyeballs!

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9

1 THESSALONIANS 1:4

PHILIPPIANS 1:6-7

*“Knowing, brethren beloved,
your election of God.”*

KNOWING YOUR ELECTION

This simple line in 1 Thessalonians 1:4 *“knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God,”* completes the sentence that began in verse 2. It expresses the certainty that Paul had for the election of the saints at Thessalonica. The reason for his assurance was he had witnessed the fruits of salvation in their lives. They had demonstrated the work of faith, labour of love and the patience of hope. As a result, Paul addressed them as *“brethren beloved”* and spoke assuredly of their election of God.

While it is true that salvation is of the Lord, and only God ever knows for sure the heart of each person, yet there are ways in which we can ascertain the fruits of salvation manifested in others. When a person comes under the convicting power of the Gospel of Christ, he will repent of his sins and turn to the Lord. His whole outlook in life begins to change as he adopts a new worldview. He is now guided by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. His desires, purposes and ambitions begin to change. Many of these changes will be evident to those around him who know him well.

Paul had received reports from Timothy about the Thessalonian Christians. Timothy *“brought us good tidings of your faith and charity”* (1 Thess 3:6). Thus, Paul could speak with good confidence about the certainty of their salvation.

Dear reader, are you certain of your election? Do you know for sure that you have been chosen by God, called to salvation by His Holy Spirit and cleansed by the blood of Christ? All believers can have the assurance of their salvation, for our confidence does not lie in our own merits, but in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This change in us should also be evident to the people around us. They should be able to observe our testimony and know that we have indeed been transformed by the power of God, and are daily sanctified by God’s Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

THOUGHT: Do my loved ones know that I am saved?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the assurance of my salvation.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

1 THESSALONIANS 1:5-6

ROMANS 1:16-17

“...the power of God
unto salvation...”

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO CONVERT

Romans 1:16 describes the Gospel as “*the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*” God’s mighty power is evident in how He is able, through the Gospel, to turn a sinner into a saint, a follower of Satan into a child of God. Through the Gospel, a person is thoroughly converted, such that he has an entirely new worldview, a new purpose to live for. He is a new creature.

This is what Paul and the Thessalonians experienced as the Gospel worked its mighty work among them when Paul witnessed to them. Acts 17:2 records how he went in among them and for “*three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures.*” Yet the power to convert did not come from Paul himself. He explained that “*our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*” It was not because he was very eloquent or charismatic that caused the Thessalonians to be convinced and moved them to believe. It was the power of the Holy Spirit that worked through the words of the Gospel. When that happened, there was much assurance to know that God had certainly worked in their hearts to convict them of their sin, cause them to repent and believe in Christ.

That same process has happened to every true believer of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have all experienced the mighty power of God in our lives through the Gospel that was shared with us. In spite of our sin and unworthiness, we became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We received the Word of God as divine truth and experienced the joy of the Holy Ghost. Our lives have been thoroughly converted, we are a new creature. These are all testament to the power of God and the life-changing effects of the Gospel. Dear reader, has this happened in your life?

THOUGHT: The power of the Gospel is greater than any force that this world has ever known.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the great work that Thou hast wrought in my heart in turning me away from the world and unto Thyself.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-8

ACTS 17:1-9

*“For from you sounded out
the word of the Lord...”*

THE EXPONENTIAL INCREASE OF THE GOSPEL

While we do not know the exact number of converts that resulted from Paul's ministry in Thessalonica, Acts 17:4 records that out of the Jews, *“some of them believed”*, and *“of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”* Paul described them as becoming *“followers of us, and of the Lord”* (1 Thess 1:6). It was a large enough group to draw the ire of the unbelieving Jews who persecuted them (Acts 17:5-6). Having received the Gospel, these new believers patterned themselves after Paul and his fellow missionaries. They learned from their evangelistic zeal and perseverance amid persecution, and in turn, they became *“ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia”* (1 Thess 1:7). What a wonderful transformation!

Not only were they an encouragement to other believers, they also became keen evangelists. From them, the Word of God *“sounded out”* (1 Thess 1:8, literally to emit a loud sound) in the regions round about. Despite the persecution that they faced, this fledgling church became well known in the area for their godly testimony and evangelistic zeal. It is certain that through their efforts, even more people were coming to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout the history of Christendom, there have been many churches like the Thessalonians. As the parable of the mustard seed promised, the small seed of the Gospel has grown and multiplied into a large tree with many branches. Each successive generation has done their part to witness for the Lord and contributed to the extension of God's kingdom.

Just think about it: if every believer were to lead just a few people to salvation in their lifetime, and each of those believers in turn would also lead a few more people to salvation, we would have an exponential increase of believers from one generation to another! The generations before us have done their part, now it is up to us in the present to do ours. Will the Word of the Lord sound out from you?

THOUGHT: What would happen if one generation stops witnessing?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the courage and conviction to witness for Thee!

A PICTURE OF GENUINE SALVATION

Everyone is different. Everyone's testimony of salvation is unique. The trials and challenges that we face in life are many and varied, and the journey we have in Christ will not be the same as someone else's. However, because of our shared experience in Christ, there will be some defining characteristics that will be common in all believers. When we are saved, we all become new creatures in Christ, and are called to walk in the newness of life. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, Paul described the experience of the believers in Thessalonica – experiences that any true believer should be able to identify with.

First, there was a genuine repentance where they turned to God from idols or any other sins of the past. They were convicted that God is indeed the only living and true God who is perfect, holy and righteous, and will not tolerate sin. In believing in God, there was a recognition of the seriousness of sin and a desire to seek after a life of holiness.

Second, having turned away from their life of sin, they turned to serve the living and true God. Their life was then one of faithful and devoted service. Compelled by their love for God, they understood the Gospel debt that they owed and were happy to commit their lives to serve the Lord! This was the labour of love that Paul previously commended them for. Therefore, they were examples to the believers in the region and were well known for their evangelistic zeal.

Third, they looked forward to Jesus' return. They knew that this world was not their home and recognised that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They were patiently waiting, looking forward to the day where the risen Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, would come to take them home to eternity. It was this hopeful expectation that enabled them to weather through the many persecutions that they were experiencing.

Dear reader, can the same be said of your life in Christ?

THOUGHT: Would a true believer not have any of these traits?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to show forth the fruits of salvation in my life.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 13

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

“...our entrance in unto you,
that it was not in vain.”

A PURPOSEFUL EVANGELISM

When Paul embarked on his missionary journeys, it was never just for a holiday or a social visit. Paul was always very intentional in everything that he did. He was clear about the purpose behind the visits to each city - it was for the specific purpose of preaching “*Jesus Christ, and him crucified*” (1 Cor 2:2).

He reminded the Thessalonians of this fact, of how when they visited them, “*it was not vain.*” It was not an empty, meaningless endeavour. He was never flippant or aimless about what he was there for. He was always focused on the task, and very conscious of the mission that he was called to do.

Specifically for his foray into Thessalonica, we know it was in direct response to the Macedonian call he received while he was in Troas. Initially, his desire was to go further towards the northeastern parts of Asia (present day Türkiye). However, the Lord directed him through a vision of a man from Macedonia (where Thessalonica is) who said, “*Come over into Macedonia, and help us*” (Acts 16:9). After receiving this plea for help, they immediately headed west into Europe, for they “*endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them*” (Acts 16:10). His purpose was clear – fulfil the Lord’s will by going over to preach the Gospel.

When we say that we are serving the Lord and witnessing for Him, do we really mean it? Does it come from a deep-seated conviction that we are doing what God has called us to do? We must be certain that there are no ulterior motives behind our service and evangelism. We must have a clear purpose in what we claim to be doing for the Lord, that it is not done for man’s praise or to satisfy self. Otherwise, it would just be in vain, and not done truly for the Lord and His glory.

THOUGHT: What are some examples of serving the Lord in vain?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me be sure that my labour is truly for Thee, and not in vain.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14

1 THESSALONIANS 2:2

ACTS 16:11-40

“...we had suffered before,
and were shamefully entreated...”

TENACITY IN EVANGELISM

The first major city that Paul preached in before coming to Thessalonica was a place called Philippi. After he cast out an evil spirit from a damsel, he was falsely accused as a troublemaker, beaten and thrown into prison. This was what Paul was referring to about having “*suffered before, and were shamefully entreated*” (1 Thess 2:2).

Yet that experience in no way deterred Paul from continuing his mission to preach the Gospel. If anything, it further emboldened him to persevere on in the work of the Lord. He was not discouraged, but declared that “*we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention*” (1 Thess 2:2).

Such tenacity can come only from God. It was because he understood his calling and purpose that he was able to persevere amid the persecution that he was facing. It was not just in this incident, but all throughout his missionary journeys that the enemies of Christ constantly hounded him and did all that they could to hinder him. He knew the “*much contention*” (i.e. struggle and conflict) that serving the Lord entailed, for he was once a persecutor himself. Yet, he continued to be bold to preach freely without fear. Why was he able to do so? It was because his confidence was in God and not in himself. He knew that that was what God wanted him to do. Therefore, he would not stop until God told him to.

That is why he would later be able to declare in Acts 20:23-24, “*bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*” Being sure of God’s calling enabled him to have the tenacity to persevere and overcome whatever trials he faced.

THOUGHT: What discouragements have I faced in the course of witnessing for the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou embolden me to have the courage to go forth and witness for Thee and not be discouraged by any obstacles that I face.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15

1 THESSALONIANS 2:3-5

PSALM 12:1-5

*“...not of deceit,
nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.”*

HONEST EVANGELISM

Paul sincerely declared that his ministry among the Thessalonians was “*not of deceit, nor of uncleanness* (moral impurity), *nor in guile* (trickery, subtility).” Which begs the question – why would he have to make such a defence? Is there such a thing as exhortations done through lies and for sinful reasons?

Sadly, the answer is yes. Because of man’s sin, not everyone who claims to witness for the Lord does it out of a pure heart’s desire. There are many who have ulterior motives in doing what they do. Their purpose is not to serve for Jesus’ sake, but to benefit self.

That was the accusation that was levelled against Paul. When Paul wrote those words in 1 Thessalonians 2:3-5, it was a defence that he had to make against some detractors of his ministry who accused him of having self-seeking ulterior motives. According to them, Paul had allegedly used flattering words to guise his greed, and was a deceitful man who was establishing churches only to profit himself.

While we know that that is certainly not what Paul was doing, there are those who would be guilty of such. There are many so-called evangelists today who build churches and try to attract people to come just to satisfy their pride and greed. There are corrupt pastors who preach a health-and-wealth gospel to justify their luxurious lifestyles and exorbitant salaries. Many would also employ various worldly methods to trick, coerce or cajole people to come into their churches to boost their numbers.

God is our witness. He alone knows our hearts and knows if we are indeed sincere and honest in our service to Him. We must be careful to ensure that we conduct ourselves entirely above board in all our evangelistic efforts. We must do things honestly in the sight of all men, for to do otherwise will do far more harm than good to the cause of Christ.

THOUGHT: What would an unbeliever think of a dishonest evangelist?

PRAYER: Father, may my heart and motives always be pure as I seek to witness for Thee.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16

1 THESSALONIANS 2:4

1 TIMOTHY 1:11-14

*“...we were allowed of God
to be put in trust with the gospel...”*

THE PRIVILEGE OF EVANGELISM

A privilege is defined as “a special right or advantage granted or available only to a particular person or group.” If you think about it, serving God in any capacity is the highest privilege that any human can possibly have. We are but unworthy sinners; God is the Almighty, perfect and holy God who reigns and rules over all His creation. What could the all-sufficient God ever need from us lowly creatures?

Yet it is by His grace, through the finished work of the Lord Jesus, that we are granted this special right to serve Him. It is only because we have been washed and cleansed by the blood of Christ that we can now come into His presence and our works are acceptable and even pleasing to Him.

That is why when Paul spoke of his service to God, he described it as being “*allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel*” (1 Thess 2:4). The word “*allowed*” has the meaning of being approved, that Paul was tested and reckoned by God to be deemed suitable. He knew that the only reason he was even preaching was that he had a divine mandate from God. He understood that it was a high and holy honour to be entrusted with the Gospel – the most important Message that anyone can ever receive in this world!

We too need to have such a perspective when we witness for the Lord. We must count it an honour and a privilege to testify to others about our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the special right that only believers can share in. Unbelievers do not understand the Gospel and cannot be ambassadors for Christ. But we do. We have experienced the Gospel and the goodness of the Lord. We should therefore cherish this responsibility that we have been entrusted with, and perform our duty well with dignity and honour.

THOUGHT: God does not need me to serve Him, but by His grace He allows it.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to understand what a great honour it is to be counted as a servant of the great high God.

WHO ARE WE SERVING?

Jesus sternly rebuked the scribes and the Pharisees for their religious hypocrisy. They were supposed to have been the spiritual leaders of the Jews. They were self-professed experts of the law and on the surface seemed to be so zealous in their service of God. However, Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that their concern was not at all for God or His Word. They rejected Jesus and refused to believe that He is the Christ, *"for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God"* (John 12:43). That is why He thoroughly denounced them, that *"all their works they do for to be seen of men... ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity"* (Matt 23:5, 28). While they claimed to be serving God, they were really only serving themselves.

This is something that we must all be very careful of when we serve the Lord. Paul was conscious of that and took pains to ensure that his motives were never doubted. He clarified that in all that he did while he was preaching the Gospel in Thessalonica, he never did it for the glory of men or for the advancement of self.

How about us? What is it that motivates us to serve the Lord? Are we truly doing all things for the glory of God, or are we seeking our own glory? On the surface, we should know what the right answer ought to be, yet in practice, it is sometimes hard to discern. The praise of men can be something rather addictive. When we gain recognition for our hard work; when others think highly of us and shower us with praises because of our deeds, it can quickly become the idol that pushes us to want more. Our focus is then taken away from the glory of God, and we do things only because we crave the approval of men.

We must be careful to ensure that our service is truly for the Lord alone, done out of a pure heart of devotion to God. We must never rob God of the glory that is due His name.

THOUGHT: Which am I more excited about? When others praise God, or when they praise me?

PRAYER: Father, may I always seek only Thy glory in all that I do for Thee.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18

1 THESSALONIANS 2:7

ISAIAH 49:15

*“...as a nurse cherisheth
her children.”*

LIKE A NURSING MOTHER

Of all the relationships in the world, one of the noblest and most selfless is that of a mother and her newborn child. Even before the child is born, the mother bears him in her womb, enduring nine months of pregnancy and a painful childbirth to bring him into the world. Once the child is born, she hovers over him with the most tender affection, ceaselessly seeing to his every need. In return, the baby does nothing but sleep, soil himself and cry for food. Yet she lovingly tends to him, often sacrificing sleep and personal comforts to ensure that he is cared for, well fed and comfortable. That is the love that a nursing mother has for her children. It is a selfless, sacrificial and unconditional love that wants only what is best for the child. This is how she gently cherishes her children with such noble affection.

This is the picture that Paul used to describe the way that he related to the Thessalonian church. He regarded them as his newborn children, gently caring for them, like a mother would her children. He lovingly led them to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and did all in his power to nurture them with the milk and meat of the Word of God. He laboured hard in their midst and was willing to endure persecution and hardships so that they could grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

This sets the example of how we ought to serve one another. Our disposition must always be like a nursing mother – loving, kind and selfless. We must be patient, especially to those who are babes in Christ. We must be gentle as a mother would be over her crying infant. We must be willing to put self aside and endure discomforts and difficulties to ensure that they are cared for spiritually and nurtured with the Word of God. We are to take time to disciple them, teach them the Word of God and instruct them in the way of Christ. Yes, it will require sacrifice and dedication. But we must do so, because this is how God loves us.

THOUGHT: Have I been lovingly cared for when I was a spiritual babe in Christ?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou place love and compassion in my heart as I seek to serve those around me.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 19

1 THESSALONIANS 2:8

1 THESSALONIANS 3

“...so being affectionately
desirous of you.”

LIKE A DEAR FRIEND

A second picture that Paul used to describe the relationship he shared with the Thessalonian Christians was that of a dear friend. This bond was clearly evident in how he spoke of being “*affectionately desirous*” (1 Thess 2:8) of them. This is a very tender way to describe a strong yearning and longing for them. Despite having only spent three sabbaths there (before he had to flee because of persecution), he had quickly established a close and heartfelt bond with the new converts and told them, “*Ye were dear unto us.*” In the months following his departure, he continued to be deeply concerned for their spiritual well-being. He tried to return but his plans were thwarted by Satan (1 Thess 2:17-18). He then sent Timothy in his stead to follow up on them and encourage them in the Lord (1 Thess 3:1-5). In the meantime, he also continued to pray ceaselessly for them (1 Thess 3:9-13).

This dear friendship was reciprocated. Timothy reported that they “*have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you*” (1 Thess 3:6). They too yearned to reunite with Paul and rekindle the warm fellowship that they had previously experienced.

The only reason they were able to share such a strong friendship was their bond in Christ. It was not common interests or similar personalities that brought them together. Neither was it because they had spent quality time together or faced common trials together that bonded them. It simply was because of Christ. Through Christ alone are all believers drawn together as one. We have the same worldview, same purpose in life, same Lord that we serve.

Is this our heart too when we serve one another? As we become involved in the lives of the people whom we serve, and serve alongside, we care for them and become “*affectionately desirous*” of them. Do we have such a longing and desire for the people we are serving with?

THOUGHT: Do I become friends only with people I like? And do I care about people because they are my friends?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to show love and care to all the people around me.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 20

1 THESSALONIANS 2:8

2 TIMOTHY 1:11-12

*“...not the gospel of God only,
but also our own souls...”*

LIKE A DEDICATED TEACHER

Another way that Paul depicted the relationship he shared with the Thessalonians was that of a teacher. By definition, a preacher is one who teaches God's Word (2 Tim 1:11). But beyond being one who just instructs the salient points of the Gospel, Paul and his companions were willing to have imparted to them their own souls, because they were dear to them.

The picture here is not just of any ordinary teacher, but a dedicated caring teacher who pours his whole heart and soul to ensure the students get the best education possible. It is not just about conveying the information and providing the tools for the student to get the grades, but to put in the time and effort to teach, from his heart, such that the student is well rounded, that he fully understands the content of the lesson and realises that same passion the teacher has for the subject at hand.

For Paul, the subject matter was the Gospel. His purpose was not just that they knew intellectually what the Gospel was about, but that he put before them his whole life. He poured his heart and soul into presenting the Gospel to them in both his speech and his conduct. He was willing to bare his whole life before them, with the hope that they would truly understand, embrace and live out the Gospel. Therefore, he would *“very gladly spend and be spent for you”* (2 Cor 12:15).

Through the ages, servants of God have followed in the footsteps of Paul and poured out their souls as teachers of the Gospel. Countless missionaries have left their homes, travelled far and wide, hazarding their lives, all for the sake of bringing the Gospel to those who need it. The church today continues to stand because of the dedication and sacrifice of so many who have gone before us. How about you? Are you dedicated to the cause of Christ? Will you be willing to give up personal comforts and commit yourself to witness for Christ?

THOUGHT: Have I been blessed by dedicated spiritual teachers in my life?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou use me as Thy faithful servant, dedicated and committed to the Gospel of Christ.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21

1 THESSALONIANS 2:9

ACTS 20:33-35

*“...our labour and travail:
for labouring night and day...”*

LABOUR AND TRAVAIL

In our modern society, we often value convenience and speed. We want everything to be fast, good and easy. We are constantly looking for short cuts and quick fixes to achieve instant gratification. However, there is also the common saying, “There are no shortcuts to success.” This is especially true in the work of the Lord. As we serve the Lord, we must not be looking for shortcuts or loopholes, or for ways to skive. Yes, it is important to be efficient and work smart, but we must not try to get away with doing less or to find creative ways to slack.

Paul was given a mandate to preach the Gospel as a minister of Christ. To that end, he laboured hard, doing whatever it took to enlarge the kingdom of God. At times, that meant that he would have to take on work to earn money to support himself and his co-labourers in the ministry. He had no qualms getting his hands dirty, working as a tentmaker. He “*ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me*” (Acts 20:34). He did so because he did not want to be “*chargeable unto any of you,*” meaning to say he did not require money from them, but was self-sufficient while he was there. He did not want anyone to have the wrong idea about them, to have grounds to accuse them of being greedy, to say that they were preaching the Gospel only for monetary gain. His desire was that the Gospel be not hindered in any way, and therefore, he was willing to labour and travail night and day so that he could freely preach the Gospel to them.

Witnessing for the Lord is hard work. It requires time, dedication and sacrifice. A large part of it is also the testimony that we present to the unbelieving world around us. Like Paul, we must be prepared to do whatever it takes in order that those around us can come to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether it is in our homes, our work places, our classrooms or wherever God has called us to, we must work hard, for the glory of God and the testimony of our Lord Jesus.

THOUGHT: Jesus did not die on the cross to save me, just so that I can cruise through life in indolence and idleness.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the conviction of heart to labour more abundantly for Thee.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22

1 THESSALONIANS 2:5-10

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

*“...how holily and justly
and unblameably we behaved...”*

UNBLAMEABLE BEHAVIOUR

We know how important our testimony is in our witness for the Lord. Our lives must be congruent with the Gospel that we share. We cannot on one hand claim to tell others about the seriousness of sin and the need for repentance and forgiveness, yet on the other hand live a careless life of sin and depravity. Our conduct must match our confession.

Paul and his companions knew how important it was to always conduct themselves *“holily and justly and unblameably”* (1 Thess 2:10). They sought to be beyond reproach in all that they did, extremely careful to maintain an unblemished testimony so that their own lives would be the sermon they preached. This did not mean that they were claiming to be sinless. Rather, that they endeavoured to conduct themselves in a manner that others would be hard-pressed to find fault with.

It was not an arrogant boast that Paul was making. It was an earnest and sincere plea for the Thessalonian Christians to remember the testimony that they had maintained while they were in their midst, reminding them that they themselves were witnesses. But beyond just having the Thessalonian Christians as witnesses, Paul was confident of standing before God himself! This is indeed a remarkable statement to make. We know that God is omniscient. There is nothing about us that He does not know. His knowledge of us is perfect and thorough for nothing escapes His sight. Therefore, for Paul to assert that even under the all-knowing gaze of God Himself, he was confident of his and his companions' behaviour, is certainly a bold assertion to make.

How many of us can sincerely and confidently stand up to the scrutiny of our fellow men? How about inviting God Himself to come and be our witness, and declare before Him that we have nothing to hide? Or are there shameful skeletons in our closet? To bear forth an effective testimony is far more than just a hypocritical facade that we put up. It must be a consistent life of holiness and godliness.

THOUGHT: If I sincerely repent when I sin, can I still be described as unblameable in my behaviour?

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 139:23-24.)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23

1 THESSALONIANS 2:11

PROVERBS 4:1-4

*“...we exhorted and comforted
and charged every one of you...”*

AS A FATHER DOTH HIS CHILDREN

Paul here is portrayed as a father who was deeply concerned about the state of his children. He used three words in 1 Thessalonians 2:11 to describe this paternal relationship that he had with them.

First, he *“exhorted”* them. This word carries the idea of a gentle, affectionate plea that a father makes to his children as he comes alongside them and directs them concerning their spiritual lives. This same word is elsewhere translated as “beseech” or “comfort.” It gives the picture of the ongoing instruction that the father gives as he seeks to guide the child to understand the importance of faith and obedience.

Second, he *“comforted”* them. Complementing the father’s gentle pleas and exhortations were encouragement and consolations amid distresses or challenges that the child might face. The journey of sanctification is not always easy, and the Thessalonian Christians needed the right spiritual comfort to help them on their way.

Third, he *“charged”* them. This referred to a more direct, solemn instruction that was necessary to keep them in check. At times, such a stern approach is required to ensure that boundaries are not crossed and the right, non-negotiable injunctions from Scripture are adhered to.

Altogether, this is the way that a spiritual father leads his children, doing so in a manner that is affectionate yet authoritative. All fathers (and mothers too) will do well to learn from such an approach, that we can lovingly nurture our children in the fear and knowledge of the Lord.

In like manner, this is the role that spiritually mature leaders must assume over those whom God has placed under their charge. Coupled with the thoughts in 1 Thessalonians 2:8-10, they must endeavour to relate to those around them as a nursing mother, a dear friend, a dedicated teacher and also a loving father.

THOUGHT: Who should I be a “father” of?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the care and patience that Thou hast showered upon me as my loving heavenly Father.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24

1 THESSALONIANS 2:12

COLOSSIANS 1:9-11

*“That ye would walk
worthy of God...”*

TO WALK WORTHY OF GOD!

To be worthy means to have the necessary qualities that befit a person or position. The person that we want to be worthy of is God because He has called us to be a subject in His kingdom.

There is nothing in this world that is higher than God. In every positive metric of comparison, God is always the absolute highest and greatest. He is the sovereign Ruler over the whole of His creation. He is the all-perfect, all-wise and all-holy God.

As God’s children, we have been ushered into His kingdom. We have been granted the full forgiveness of all our sins and have the glorious promise of all of eternity with God in heaven. He rules over us as our Lord and Master, and we as humble and faithful servants submit to Him. He assures us of His presence with, and guidance of, us on earth.

In this life, our purpose then is to walk worthy of the calling that God has for us as His saints. It is the highest calling that anyone can ever have. It is a great honour and privilege to be granted such a calling. We must remember who we are. We are all sinners, lost and undone. Left to ourselves we can never be worthy. No, we do not even come close. It is only through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ that we can hope to stand before God and be found worthy. In God’s grace, He has accepted us in Christ and called us His sons and daughters.

Understanding all these things, it is most natural and logical to want to live up to this calling and to be worthy of all the wonderful privileges that have been accorded to us. We will want to seek to please Him in all that we do, draw close to Him and obey His Word. We will never want to disappoint Him, but rather to live for His glory and delight. Then when we finally meet Him in glory, He will welcome us as His good and faithful servants.

THOUGHT: Without Christ, I can never be worthy.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to walk worthy of Thee, pleasing Thee, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of Thee.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13

2 PETER 1:19-21

*“...as it is in truth,
the word of God...”*

THE WORDS OF MEN OR THE WORD OF GOD?

When you read the Bible or hear God’s Word being faithfully expounded, how do you receive it? Do you see it as just words written or said by men? Or as they truly are, the very words of God?

Paul explained that he was so thankful for the Thessalonian Christians’ reception of the Word that was preached to them. When Paul taught in their midst, they did not think of it as just his own ideas or opinions. They acknowledged and received him as one who was indeed preaching the Word of God. They gave due reverence and godly fear for the instruction he gave them. This gave him great reason to thank God. Note of course that as an Apostle of Christ, Paul spoke with the full authority of God, and his teachings and writings were to be accepted as the very words of God.

Furthermore, the result was that it “*effectually worketh*” (1 Thess 2:13) in all who believed. Because they had full confidence in the teachings that they received, they began to obey and apply it in their lives. God’s Word took root in their hearts, and had a very real impact in their lives.

This must be the perspective of anyone who has heard the Gospel and come to true saving faith. He must realise that the words that the preacher speaks are not just the preacher’s own, but that the preacher is a faithful mouthpiece of God’s words to him. Likewise, that must be the understanding of any church member listening to a faithful preacher.

Note that this is an important warning to every preacher as well. When he goes out to preach and teach, he must be very careful that he is indeed preaching the Word of God faithfully, and not the words of men. People like to listen to anecdotes and stories and interesting illustrations. The preacher can have some of that, but that must never be the basis of his messages. It must be the simple and clear presentation of the Gospel of Christ which is the power of God unto salvation!

THOUGHT: Which is more powerful – men’s words or God’s Word?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the faith and conviction to trust in Thy Word and apply it into all areas of my life.

SOLIDARITY IN SUFFERINGS

Because of their faith, the young converts at Thessalonica were suffering. Paul encouraged them by telling them of the churches in Judaea who were also being persecuted. For those in Judaea, their fellow Jews were the persecutors. In like manner, as the Thessalonians were being persecuted by their fellow Gentiles, they had become followers of those in Judaea. This is not to say that they intentionally patterned themselves after those in Judea. Rather, Paul said that in the way they endured persecution, they reminded him of the churches at Judaea – churches that were likewise resilient in the face of persecution. This was a sure sign of their spiritual maturity. They were willing to continue to stand for God amid much affliction and discouragement. Their allegiance to Christ was not simply a casual choice that they made, or a thoughtless declaration of faith that suited their convenience. Their resilience demonstrated their true faith, which enabled them to stand firm despite the heavy persecution they faced.

Through this, Paul's encouragement to them was that they were certainly not alone in their struggles with persecution. Just as Elijah needed to know (after the events of Mt Carmel and the threats from Jezebel) that there continued to be a remnant that did not bow down to Baal, we too can be encouraged to know that there is a remnant today that continues to be faithful amid the growing oppression and persecution of faithful Christians. There can be solidarity in suffering, not because we all enjoy suffering together, but rather through our shared experiences, we experience the “*fellowship of (Christ's) sufferings*” (Phil 3:10) and, in so doing, mature in our faith.

If we are going through any sort of persecution, or are suffering for Christ, let us take comfort in the fact that generations of faithful saints have already trod that same path before us. They have run their race. Now it is our turn to run ours.

THOUGHT: How hard it must have been for Jesus to face the cross alone!

PRAYER: Father, grant me the courage to continue to be faithful to Thee amid persecution.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 27

1 THESSALONIANS 2:15-16

ACTS 4:15-21

*“Forbidding us to speak...
that they might be saved...”*

THE EVANGELIST’S FRUSTRATION

While evangelism will bring with it fruits and rewards, its results will not always be immediately evident. There are numerous testimonies of missionaries who served faithfully for years, yet saw no fruit in their lifetime. Instead, what they experienced were various trials and challenges, persecutions and hardship.

As we serve the Lord and witness for Him, we cannot always expect things to be easy and smooth. Instead, we must be prepared for opposition to the Gospel and persecution against those who would spread and teach it. This will inadvertently result in suffering, as Paul warned, *“yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Tim 3:12).

That was what Paul encountered time and again as he embarked on his missionary journeys. Yet what was most frustrating for Paul was not the personal hardship that he faced. He did not complain about the beatings, imprisonments or stoning that he received. He did not decry the hard work that was involved or the time he spent on the road. His main frustration was the fact that the Gospel work was hindered by persecutors. Because Paul was an evangelist with a true heart for God, what was most galling for him was that the persecutors were *“forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved”* (1 Thess 2:16).

Is that our frustration when we go out to evangelise? Or are we more concerned about our personal comforts, pride and safety? Are we really going out to preach for God’s sake that people may enter His kingdom? Or are we doing it for self? If our concern is for the work of the Gospel, then when we face persecution, we know that it is not personal. We will not be easily discouraged. We may be frustrated by the opposition faced and troubled by the hindrances to our evangelism, but our faith is always in Christ. We know that salvation is of God. In His perfect time, He will save whom He will, and no persecutor can stop Him.

THOUGHT: Knowing what upsets us reveals where our true heart is.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the resilience and courage to persevere in my witness for Thee no matter what opposition I face.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28

1 THESSALONIANS 2:15-16

REVELATION 16:5-7

*“...the wrath is come upon them
to the uttermost.”*

UTTERMOST WRATH!

Paul's description of the persecutors ends with a chilling warning to all those who would seek to hinder the work of the Gospel. To such, *“the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost”* (1 Thess 2:16). This is referring to the divine judgment of the wrath of God that will come upon them to the highest degree. It is the perfect and complete judgment that God will mete out against sinners and those who would deliberately hinder the work of the Gospel. While it is a warning to them, it also comes as a comfort us. It is a reminder that above all, the all-knowing and all-powerful God is in control, and He will know how to care justly for His own.

The reasons for God's wrath upon the persecutors are given in the verses prior. Their actions were displeasing to God and were contrary to all men. They deliberately went out of their way to prevent the spread of the Gospel. It is a terribly heinous thing to do – attempting to prevent others from coming to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. In so doing, they condemn not just their own souls but seek to damn the souls of others as well. But what they are really doing is adding more and more sin to the ledger of their account. On the day that the books are opened and God makes a reckoning of all the sins that they have chalked up, they will suddenly realise that they do in fact deserve the wrath that will come upon them.

For us, as we face the struggles and challenges of witnessing for the Lord, we must always remember that God is a fair and just God who is always in control. While there will be problems, we are exhorted to wait upon the Lord with the patience of hope. We should not worry about things that we cannot control, but instead leave them to our sovereign God. We simply focus on what we can control and do what we can to serve Him! Know that on the part of the opposers, they will have their reward. They will be judged for the sins that they have committed. Instead of being angry with them, we continue to witness to them with love and compassion, hoping that they too will repent and be saved!

THOUGHT: The Apostle Paul was once a persecutor too!

PRAYER: Father, *“true and righteous are thy judgments”* (Rev 16:7).

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29

1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-18

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-18

"But... not in heart..."

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

Paul had a good work going at Thessalonica. For three Sabbaths, he preached, and some believed and started to serve the Lord faithfully. However, Satan intervened and forced Paul and his companions out of the city. Paul had a great desire to return to *"perfect that which is lacking in your faith"* (1 Thess 3:10).

It seems that after he left, those who opposed him began to spread negative rumours about him, questioning his motives and telling the church that Paul no longer cared for them and had left them for good. That was why Paul had to assure them that he had a great desire to return, but Satan's hindrances were preventing him from returning.

Satan's desire, in causing all these persecutions, was for Paul to give up and stop serving. He wanted Paul to lament, "What is the point of fighting so hard if all I get is more persecution, more trials, more suffering?" This was the same method that Satan used on Job, wanting him to curse God and die. But Paul understood the nature of the spiritual warfare and was not easily discouraged. Instead, he wrote to assure the brethren that though they were physically separated, they were not separated in heart. His heart was still very much with them, and he endeavoured the more abundantly to see them with great desire. This is the heart of a faithful servant of God. He was willing to suffer all this if it would grant him the opportunity to return to his spiritual children and minister to them. Many caught in the same situation would have been discouraged and given up a long time ago.

How about us in our service for the Lord? Are we easily discouraged by the conflicts and afflictions that we face? It may seem that every time we try to serve, troubles arise! Realise that this is the work of the devil, and his desire is for you to be discouraged and give up. Instead, let us declare: *"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed"* (2 Cor 4:8-9).

THOUGHT: If we give up, Satan wins.

PRAYER: Father, may I be able to persevere in my service for Thee.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30
1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-18
MATTHEW 13:18-23

*“...once and again;
but Satan hindered us.”*

SATAN HINDERED US!

From the first temptation in the Garden of Eden, Satan, the adversary, the Devil, has been locked in a spiritual warfare with mankind. Satan's objectives are simple: He hates God and so is opposed to all who are serving God. He craves the worship of men and will do all he can to turn their hearts away from God and towards himself.

His targets are those who are doing a good work for the Lord. If you are serving the Lord, faithfully doing His work, you will be a target of Satan's attacks. We cannot run away from this fact. A faithful Christian will always be in an ongoing fight, a spiritual warfare.

Paul understood this. He knew that when he was chased out of Thessalonica, it was not just a physical battle, but also a spiritual one. Paul's simple desire was to preach the Gospel, to encourage the new converts and strengthen their faith. But that was directly against Satan's purpose, and therefore there was a conflict. The persecution he faced was the work of the devil, and the hindrances that prevented him from making a swift return was also Satan's doing. Furthermore, it was not just a one-off event. It was happening again and again. It seemed that no matter what Paul did, Satan somehow had a way to prevent him from returning to Thessalonica.

These are the same tactics that Satan continues to use against faithful Christians in the present. Like the birds that come to devour the seeds that fall on the wayside, Satan swoops in to prevent the Word of God from being preached, heard and received. He uses social media to distract us from our daily quiet time; he poisons the minds of the people to cause them to hate Christ and to reject the Bible; he fills the world with a myriad of activities on Sundays to prevent people from having the time to come to church. Yes, Satan continues to actively hinder us from following the Lord, and from witnessing for Him. Will you stand firm against the wiles of the Devil?

THOUGHT: Satan has spent thousands of years perfecting his art of deception and temptation.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to submit to Thee, and to resist the Devil.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31

1 THESSALONIANS 2:19-20

REVELATION 19:6-9

*“What is our hope, or joy,
or crown of rejoicing?”*

THE EVANGELIST’S REWARD

In the concluding verses of 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul shared some thoughts that revealed his heart. He explained to his readers why he yearned to return to Thessalonica. His concern was basically for their spiritual welfare – for their salvation and sanctification. He earnestly wanted to be with them so that he could minister to them and thwart Satan’s efforts to undo the good work that he had started in their midst.

Paul shared that his hope and joy, the motivation behind his service, as he looked forward to the day of Christ’s return (1 Thess 2:19), was that the souls that he had a part in ministering to would be there standing alongside him. For him, that would be the grand fruition of all his labours, when he could be certain that all his spiritual children were eternally saved. It would be a glorious day of rejoicing (1 Thess 2:20) when the saints stand before our great Saviour, and we can cast our crowns before Him in eternal praise.

Is this what we are looking forward to as well? Is this what motivates us in our service to the Lord? What an exciting day it will be as we stand in the presence of Christ at His coming. Surely, we would not want to be alone on that day! We would want to look around us and see our friends and loved ones, all the fellow saints that we had a hand in witnessing to or played a part in helping them in their journey of sanctification. It would be a most blessed reunion as we meet the Lord in our glorified bodies and join in the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb. This is the eternal reward that we can all look forward to as we serve the Lord as witnesses for Him in the present.

As the third stanza in the hymn “O That Will Be Glory” reads:

*Friends will be there I have loved long ago;
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet just a smile from my Savior, I know,
Will through the ages be glory for me.*

THOUGHT: What is it in life that brings me the greatest joy?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou renew my zeal to witness for Thee, as I look forward to the glorious day of Christ’s return.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1

1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-2

PHILIPPIANS 2:4

*“Wherefore when we
could no longer forbear...”*

A GOOD IMPATIENCE

Generally, the Bible praises patience as a virtue, and warns against making hasty, rash decisions. Yet, there are times when it is good to have what we can call a “good impatience.” It is not the sort of impatience where we become frustrated or angry and start to take foolish, sinful actions. Rather it is a godly yearning that stems from a holy desire; one that results in productive, proactive actions done according to God’s will.

Shortly after leaving Thessalonica, Paul was in Berea valiantly attempting to find a way back to Thessalonica (Acts 17:10-15). He was concerned for the faith of this young group of converts that he had left behind. He was eager to return to establish and build them up in their faith. However, because Satan’s hindrances against him had been too difficult to overcome, Paul, when he could “*no longer forbear*” (1 Thess 3:1), made the difficult decision to send Timothy in his place. Yet, by sending Timothy, it would mean that he would be left alone in Athens, a large foreign city steeped in idolatry. Nonetheless, Paul felt that the Thessalonians’ faith was of the utmost priority and was willing to make that sacrifice for their benefit.

This is an example of positive solutions that stem from a good impatience. Paul made the decision because he could “*no longer forbear*” – meaning he could not endure the waiting and uncertainty any longer. He needed to know how they were and wanted to do something to guide them in their spiritual walk. He was not content to just sit idle and do nothing about it, and he therefore took measures to solve the problem he was facing.

We must again note that such good impatience must stem from godly desires and not self-centred or carnal ones. If our purpose is right and godly, then our response will be in line with the will of God. We cannot always just wait for things to happen or think that someone else will have it covered. If we have the right sense of urgency about things, it can be the right catalyst needed to make them happen.

THOUGHT: Can good desires sometimes lead to wrong solutions?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me godly desires to seek only after Thy will in this life.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 2

1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-2

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-24

*"...our fellowlabourer
in the gospel of Christ..."*

FELLOW LABOURER

Timothy was a faithful companion of Paul who first joined him at the start of his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3). He was together with Paul and Silas when they came to Thessalonica and experienced persecutions together with them. They had probably only served together for some months, but in the short time that they had been together, young Timothy had proven himself to be a faithful and trustworthy servant of the Lord. Paul therefore entrusted him with the mission of returning to Thessalonica to follow up with them and see how they were doing.

Although Timothy was a fair bit younger than Paul, Paul regarded him as an equal. He described him as *"our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ"* (1 Thess 3:2). In describing him as a brother, Paul expressed his confidence in his salvation, and that he was a close brother-in-Christ whom he cared dearly for. He recognised Timothy's calling as a minister (servant) of God, that he had faithfully discharged the duties that had been placed upon him. In Philippians 2:20-21, Paul commended him as one who was likeminded and selfless in his care for others. He regarded him as a fellow labourer in the Gospel, one whom Paul was proud to serve alongside and co-labour with.

Like Timothy, all of us are called to be fellow labourers one of another. We have all been saved to serve, called to be servants of the most high God. We may not be called in the same way that Timothy was, to travel alone to dangerous places to hazard our lives for the Gospel's sake. But wherever it is that God has called us to, we must faithfully labour for the Lord alongside our fellow saints. It is indeed a great joy and blessing to have brothers and sisters-in-Christ that we can rely on and serve together with. We will be able to mutually edify and encourage one another in the Lord, fully confident that we all have one another's best interest at heart.

THOUGHT: Do the people around me regard me as a faithful, fellow labourer in the Gospel of Christ?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to be a faithful steward of Thine in all that I do.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3

1 THESSALONIANS 3:3-4

1 PETER 4:12-13

*“...know that we are
appointed thereunto.”*

CALLED TO SUFFER

Paul was worried that the Thessalonian Christians would be discouraged because of the persecutions and difficulties that he and his fellow missionaries were facing. He was concerned that upon seeing how they had to suffer tribulation for the Gospel's sake, they might be moved (troubled), and be tempted to give up the faith or be deterred from serving the Lord for fear of these afflictions. This was not an unfounded concern.

Jesus had warned in the Parable of the Soils, that like the seed that fell upon stony places, there would be many that *“heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended”* (Matt 13:20-21).

That was why he sent Timothy to them, so that Timothy could minister to them and encourage them amid the tribulations they were facing. Paul wanted to quell any doubts and fears that they might have. Paul also reminded them that these difficulties and persecutions were in fact expected, and even *“appointed thereunto”* (1 Thess 3:3). It is not the first time that Paul had told them about this, for he had already warned them that faithful believers would suffer tribulation, and they themselves witnessed it happening to Paul when he was chased out of Thessalonica.

Similarly, we must also be prepared to face trials and afflictions in our lives. In the course of living holy lives and witnessing for the Lord, there will be times when we will be called to suffer for Jesus' sake. Instead of doing all we can to avoid it, Peter exhorted us not to be surprised, but rather to *“rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings”* (1 Pet 4:13). That is the right perspective that we ought to have. Our sovereign God will, in His perfect wisdom, appoint us to go through times of afflictions. As we endure these tribulations with patience, know that these experiences will strengthen our faith and draw us closer to God.

THOUGHT: If it is God's will for me to go through afflictions, why do I struggle against it?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the patience and conviction to understand the role of suffering in my life.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

1 THESSALONIANS 3:5

PHILIPPIANS 1:23-30

"I sent to know your faith..."

CONCERN FOR YOUR FAITH

As he sat in Athens waiting, a myriad of concerns must have entered Paul's mind. In those days, communication was poor, and there was no way that Paul could have known how the church was progressing. The only way would be to send an eyewitness to see them personally and report on how they were doing. Separated from them and awaiting news of them, he was deeply concerned that they might come under Satan's attack and be swayed from the faith, making their previous labour to none effect. That was the heart of the Apostle Paul – the nursing mother who was continually concerned for his "spiritual children."

His concern was always for their faith. For Paul, that was always the most important thing. That was his purpose in embarking on his second missionary journey, as he told Barnabas in Acts 15:36: *"Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do."* Looking at the whole of 1 Thessalonians 3, the phrase *"your faith"* is mentioned a total of four times (in verses 2, 5, 7 and 10). It shows what was foremost on his mind, and that was why he thought to send Timothy to them.

In all our relationships, what is the chief concern that we have for the people around us? Our friends and our loved ones, the people who are closest to us. What is it that you are really concerned about in their lives? We get to know one another better, and learn about their hobbies, interests, favourite things, etc. But do we know each other well on a spiritual level? Are we concerned for their faith and their walk with the Lord? Do we know how their prayer life is like, and how their daily devotions are? It is indeed such a blessing to have close brothers and sisters-in-Christ who are concerned about one another's spiritual well-being, and will take the time to connect with one another on a higher spiritual level. That way, we can more readily provoke one another unto love and unto good works.

THOUGHT: When was the last time I shared about my spiritual triumphs and struggles with someone else?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou place in me the sincere desire to care for the faith and spiritual well-being of others around me.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5

1 THESSALONIANS 3:5

1 PETER 5:6-9

“...the tempter have tempted you,
and our labour be in vain.”

WHAT IF SATAN SUCCEEDS?

One form of attack that Satan employs is that of temptation, where he seeks to compel, entice, or entrap one to do that which is evil and displeasing to God. It was through the temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit that he incited the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, which was also the method he tried to use against Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Although the name “*tempter*” is directly attributed to Satan only twice in the Bible (Matt 4:3; 1 Thess 3:5), temptation is certainly a ploy that Satan is continually using and is what we must be wary of.

The temptation that the Christians at Thessalonica were facing were the afflictions and tribulations that they were going through. Through that, Satan’s desire was that they would be moved, tempted to stop witnessing for the Lord or give up their faith altogether. If that were to happen, then Paul’s labour in their midst would be in vain – it would amount to nothing, it would be deemed a lost cause.

Paul said that not because he was concerned for self-glory. It was not that he rued the waste of his time and effort. His foremost concern, as we have seen earlier, was for the faith of the Thessalonian Christians. If his labour was in vain, it means that all his efforts to nurture their faith would have been for naught. The witness of the church would have been snuffed out, and he would have to start from scratch all over again. It would also mean that Satan’s temptation was successful.

Surely, we would not want Satan to succeed. In the spiritual warfare that we are all in, our calling is to stand firm against the wiles of the devil. We must “*submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*” (James 4:7). The alternative is to give up and turn away from God. When we throw in the towel, stop serving and give in to the afflictions and hardships that we are facing, it means that we have been moved, and Satan has won.

THOUGHT: Satan may win some battles, but he will never win the war.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6

1 THESSALONIANS 3:5-6

ACTS 20:36-38

*“...desiring greatly to see us,
as we also to see you.”*

FRIENDSHIP RECIPROCATED

Paul cared deeply for the Thessalonian Christians. His concerns were so strong that he was content to be left alone, and sent Timothy to check in on them and encourage them in the faith. Then Timothy returned with good news of their faith and charity, and that they remembered Paul fondly, desiring to see him as much as he of them. This must have brought great delight and relief to Paul. It made the sacrifice of sending Timothy worth it. It is indeed so heart-warming to see the friendship between Paul and the Thessalonian Christians. The mutual love and concern that they had for one another was made possible only through the bonds of Christ.

As we know, friendship ought to be a two-way street. The affections, care and concern that true friends have for each other must run both ways. Seeing how Paul was so invested in the spiritual well-being of the Thessalonian Christians, it would have been a very sad and ungrateful response if that friendship was unrequited. Thankfully, that was not the case. The Thessalonians were indeed very grateful for the ministry of Paul in their midst and longed for him to return.

True friendship can blossom only if the friendship is reciprocated. Both sides must exhibit love and spiritual concern one for another. The friendship can thrive only if there is an active desire to support and encourage each other in the Lord, and each would selflessly and lovingly be willing to give of themselves for the spiritual benefit of the other.

If you have a friend, or perhaps a church leader who cares about your spiritual state, and is willing to put in the time and effort to meet you to help you, guide you, follow up with you, will you be happy to reciprocate? Or do you sometimes push away those who could have been true friends, and prefer instead to revel in your worldly friends who do nothing to draw you closer to the Lord?

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 27:9.)

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the friendships that Thou hast brought into my life. May Thou teach me to be a good friend to those around me.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7

1 THESSALONIANS 3:7-8

PHILIPPIANS 4:1

*“For now we live,
if ye stand fast in the Lord.”*

WE LIVE, IF WE STAND FAST IN THE LORD

When Paul heard of the good news concerning the Thessalonian Christians' faith and charity, he rejoiced greatly! All the fears and concerns that he had were gone, for they had persevered amid the affliction that they were experiencing. In fact, he shared with them that this news of their faith brought him a great deal of much needed comfort – especially timely, given the affliction and distress that he himself was going through.

Therefore, Paul declared that *“now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord”* (1 Thess 3:8). This seemed to suggest that prior to receiving this news, Paul was spiritually despondent, perhaps discouraged by the much persecution and opposition that he had been facing. He was afraid that the new believers in Thessalonica, whom he cared so dearly for, were being hopelessly assailed by Satan's attacks. But, upon hearing the good tidings that they were standing fast in the Lord, his spirit revived, and he was able, as it were, to live again!

Through this, we see how our faith can so positively impact others. When we are faithful and serve the Lord, we can be a source of encouragement to others, especially to those who care dearly for us. When we stand firm in the Lord amid trials or persecution, we can become an inspiration for others to do likewise. We must never underestimate the power that a godly testimony can bring. Through our lives, we can influence others to follow after the Lord, just as we have.

Therefore, seek to be mindful of the testimony that we present to others. Even our pastors and church leaders need comfort and encouragement. When they see us faithfully serving the Lord and remaining steadfast in the faith, it does bring them no small amount of joy. May we all do what we can to encourage one another in the Lord. You never know who may be watching, and whose life you may impact today.

THOUGHT: My perseverance in Christ can encourage others in ways that I may not even realise.

PRAYER: Father, help me to always stand fast upon Thee, never wavering.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

1 THESSALONIANS 3:9

1 CORINTHIANS 3:4-9

“...for all the joy
wherewith we joy...”

GRATEFUL REJOICING

Paul had already shared his thanksgiving for the Thessalonians earlier in this epistle. But then as he reflected on their perseverance in the faith, he could not help but waxed lyrical with another exclamation of praise and thanksgiving. Timothy's good tidings brought him so much relief and joy, and very naturally that led him to want to thank God, whom he acknowledged as the Source of their faithfulness.

In the midst of his rejoicing, Paul did not allow himself to be carried away and be tempted to claim any credit for the Thessalonians' steadfastness. He knew that the only reason they were able to persevere in their faith was because of God Himself. Paul knew he was but the sower who brought the seed of the Gospel to them, but God was the one who granted the increase.

Therefore, he asked the question, “*For what thanks can we render to God again for you*” (1 Thess 3:9)? The word translated as “*render...again*” in the original has the meaning of giving or returning something back. Paul was basically asking how he could ever thank God enough, for what sort of thanks could he give to God that would be commensurate with the immense joy that he had received because of them? To him all his labour and all the suffering he faced were truly worth it all. It was but light affliction compared to the joy that he experienced then, and so his heart burst forth in thanksgiving and praise.

Is this the sort of joy that we experience before the Lord as well? Is our joy selfless and spiritual, rooted in the blessings of others? When souls are saved, when we see people drawn to the Lord and become more active in service and evangelism, what is our response? If we have such pure, spiritual joy, it will result in a godly gratitude to God. We will shout forth in praise and thanksgiving, rejoicing in the goodness of God!

THOUGHT: What would bring me greater delight – the salvation and sanctification of a loved one, or a sudden financial windfall?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou cultivate in me a heart of gratitude that finds joy only in the things pertaining to Thee.

PRAYING NIGHT AND DAY!

Prayer is so important in every believer's life. All throughout Scripture, there are numerous examples of fervent, consistent prayer lives. Jesus Himself exemplified this in the times when *"in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed"* (Mark 1:35). Likewise, David in Psalm 55:17, *"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice."*

In a similar vein, Paul shared that he was praying night and day exceedingly, pleading with God for an opportunity to return to Thessalonica to strengthen their faith. The Greek word used for *"praying"* is a less common word in the New Testament that describes strong, ardent prayers that stem from a desperate yearning or need. Coupled with Paul's use of the word *"exceedingly,"* the whole phrase depicts a prayer that was intense, fervent and protracted. His choice of these strong, emphatic terms to describe his prayers shows how earnestly he felt about the importance of prayer, and how zealously he dedicated himself to seeking the Lord.

Through Paul's example, we can learn the lesson of the importance of consistent and earnest prayer. It is through prayer that we have a healthy communion with God. We bring our requests to Him and have full assurance that as our loving heavenly Father, He delights to hear our cries, and will in His perfect time answer us.

How is your prayer life? Are you praying earnestly, continually and consistently? If we realise that our prayers are lacking, let us pray that the Lord will help us in our prayers. On our part, let us make a concerted effort to pray more. The more we pray, the more we will want to pray, for we will experience the hand of God present in our lives.

THOUGHT: "Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?"

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the privilege of prayer. May Thou help me to pray more earnestly, fervently and consistently as I ought.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10

1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-12

JOHN 13:34-35

*“...to increase and abound
in love one toward another...”*

ABOUNDING LOVE

As believers, we are taught to love one another. It is the hallmark of what it means to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, as Jesus taught His disciples in John 13:34-35: *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”*

That was Paul’s prayer on behalf of the Thessalonian Christians. His desire for them was that they would increase and abound in love, not just for their fellow believers, but for all men. This is not to say that the Thessalonian Christians were deficient in this area. Paul had previously commended them for their *“labour of love”* (1 Thess 1:3). Likewise, Timothy’s report brought tidings of their faith and charity (1 Thess 3:6). Later in the epistle he would state: *“as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in Macedonia”* (1 Thess 4:9-10). By all accounts, we can say that they were a very loving people, and their love was evident to all.

Yet Paul’s prayer was that they would continue to grow in love. This is an important reminder for all of us that we must never be complacent in our spiritual growth. We must never come to a point in our lives where we think that we are loving enough and do not need to increase in our love anymore. Remember that the benchmark of love that Christ has set for us is to love *“as I have loved you.”* No one can ever claim to be as loving as Christ, and therefore, there will always be areas in our lives where we can be more loving in. If ever we think we do not need to increase in love any longer, it is a sure sign that pride and complacency have set in. It will do us much good to search the Scriptures to learn more about the love of God, and what true biblical love is.

THOUGHT: In what areas of my life can I be more loving?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou fill me with Thy love, that I will learn to love my neighbour as myself, and to continue to increase and abound in love.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11

1 THESSALONIANS 3:13

EPHESIANS 5:25-27

*“...hearts unblameable in
holiness before God...”*

UNBLAMEABLE IN HOLINESS

What does it mean to be “*unblameable in holiness before God*” (1 Thess 3:13)? It does seem to be an extremely high bar, unattainable by human efforts. Yet, that was something that Paul prayed for on behalf of the Thessalonian Christians. He prayed that as they increased and abounded in love, it was towards the end goal that their hearts would be fixed in a position of irreproachable holiness in the sight of God. This describes a pure heart that desires to be sinless before God, sanctified and set apart for the Master’s use.

It is clear that none of us have attained that yet. While we may sometimes have such a desire, we know (if we are honest with ourselves) how our hearts often waver. We are easily allured by the temptations of the world and do not always have a pure heart’s desire to live for Christ. We are still far from the mark that the Lord has set for us.

Therefore, this is also a prayer that all of us must make. On our own, we can never compel our hearts to be fixed in a position of holiness. Though human effort and discipline may bring us to a point, it will never enable us to be completely steadfast and unwavering before the Lord. We need God’s grace to guide us. It is only through the means of grace that He has given us that will help us to grow in our sanctification. Christ, as the Bridegroom of the Church, will continually sanctify and cleanse us through His Word, for His purpose is to present Himself “*a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish*” (Eph 5:27).

Let us all therefore yield ourselves to the Lord, looking forward to the day of Christ’s return. In the meantime, the promise is that the Lord will continue to make us more and more holy. And when the Lord returns to receive us unto Himself, we shall all be granted the incorruptible, immortal, glorified bodies. Yes, in that day, our hearts will be established, unblameable in holiness before God!

THOUGHT: (Read 1 John 3:3.)

PRAYER: (Use 1 Peter 5:10.)

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1

EPHESIANS 4

“...how ye ought to walk
and to please God...”

A WALK THAT PLEASES GOD

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul entered a new section of his epistle, where he exhorted the readers directly. In chapters 1 to 3, he recounted some of the events and experiences that he had with them, of how the Gospel came to them and how he rejoiced over their faith. He gave some updates of events that had transpired in the months since he left them. Now in chapters 4 and 5, he came to the main gist of his letter where he shared certain important instructions that he wanted to teach them.

He began with a very general but impactful exhortation, that they “*ought to walk and to please God*” (1 Thess 4:1). This is the simple principle that every Christian must adopt as the motto in his life. Throughout Scripture, the term “*walk*” has been used to describe one’s conduct, the way that one carries oneself, one’s manner of life. Paul called for them to be very conscious of the way they lived, the choices they made and the things that they did – that it must be done in accordance with God’s desires for them (likewise, for us), in a manner that would bring great pleasure and delight to Him. Furthermore, they must “*abound more and more*” (1 Thess 4:1)! They were never to rest on their laurels, but to continually increase and improve in their walk with God, doing more each day to live lives that please Him.

How is your walk with the Lord? Do you seek to please the Lord in all that you do? Is He alone the foremost priority of your life, such that all your decisions are centred on the desire to do His will? That is what a walk that pleases God looks like. It is one that daily denies self, takes up the cross and follows the Lord. Unfortunately, many who claim to be Christians today care nothing about pleasing God. They seek only to please themselves and fulfil their own desires. As Paul warned, that is what it will be like in the last days, where many will be “*lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*” (2 Tim 3:4-5). Which is a description of you?

THOUGHT: Is your walk today better than it was yesterday?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to walk in a way that pleases Thee, and may my walk with Thee be closer with each passing day.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-2

PHILIPPIANS 4:9

*“...ye know what commandments
we gave you by the Lord Jesus.”*

HOW DO WE KNOW HOW TO WALK?

Podiatrists are doctors who specialise in people's lower limbs. They often deal with patients who have some problems with their physical walking. Podiatrists have specialised instruments that are able to measure a person's gait, footfall, posture and other metrics to analyse and diagnose what the problem is. They would then suggest solutions, such as specialised footwear or other aids, physiotherapy exercises, or surgical procedures if necessary.

When it comes to our spiritual walk, we need a specialist to analyse our walk and diagnose it as well. If there are problems with our walk with the Lord, it should be natural to want to find solutions to fix whatever issue we have. Unlike our physical walk where there is the inevitable degeneration that comes with old age, our spiritual walk is one that should only improve over time with increasing maturity. If your walk is still the same as it has been from the time that you were born again, then it is a serious issue that needs to be investigated.

Paul explained that the instruction for improving our walk is right in front of us. They are the commandments that have been given to every believer through the Lord Jesus Christ. He told the Thessalonian Christians that they had already received it from him, referencing the time when he was in their midst. These were the words that came from the mouth of Paul, but they rightly received them as the words of God (1 Thess 2:13).

We all have the perfect and complete Word of God in our hands today. The very same words that Paul penned to the Thessalonians (and all the rest of Scripture) continue to be instructional for us today. It is our spiritual podiatry guide as to how we can daily improve our walk with the Lord. In it are the various commandments, exhortations, statutes and testimonies that teach us how we can please the Lord in all aspects of our lives. Will you read this Word, cherish it, and seek to apply it in your life?

THOUGHT: What aspect of my spiritual walk needs improving?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to be humble before Thy Word, and guide me to increase and abound in my walk with Thee.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3

GENESIS 39

*“...that ye should abstain
from fornication.”*

ABSTAIN FROM FORNICATION

The heart of every true believer is one that desires to seek after the will of God. As David declared in Psalm 40:8, *“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”* The life of the Christian then is simply one that continually seeks to know and do God’s will. We must realise that the will of God is not some mysterious, nebulous thing that is hard to discern. For the most part it is about simply obeying God’s Word, for in it He has so clearly revealed His desire for us.

For all who are born again, the general purpose that God has for us is our sanctification, an ongoing process that happens from the point of our salvation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are set apart for God and transformed to become more and more like Christ. It is a change that happens throughout the course of our lives, enabling us to produce fruits of salvation and holiness.

One area in particular that Paul highlighted is the sin of fornication. This refers to all manner of sexual immorality and any sexual relations outside the covenant of marriage. Part of growing in sanctification then is to abstain from all manner of fornication. The word *“abstain”* (1 Thess 4:3) has the idea of “holding oneself off from, to refrain.” To abstain from fornication then is to have a strong separation from any hint of sexual immorality. It is not just to gently refrain from, but to very strictly disallow any untoward sexual relation to come within your range. That is the extent to which we must distance ourselves from any potential temptation that may come our way, so that we never fall prey to this sin.

We must be like Joseph who was so conscientious in guarding his purity. Despite the ongoing temptations that his master’s wife enticed him with, he was insistent that he could not commit this great wickedness and sin against God. When cornered by her, he physically fled and got out, endangering his life but maintaining his purity. May we all learn to abstain from fornication and continue to grow in our sanctification.

THOUGHT: Many lives are ruined by a fleeting moment of pleasure.

PRAYER: Father, help me to walk in purity, and abstain from anything that is displeasing to Thee.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15

1 THESSALONIANS 4:4-5

2 TIMOTHY 2:20-22

*“...how to possess his vessel
in sanctification and honour.”*

ARE YOU A RESPONSIBLE OWNER?

To take ownership of something means that we are responsible for that thing. For example, home ownership is an onerous task. Upon taking possession of a property, it is now our responsibility to maintain it, to ensure that bills are paid and faults rectified. An irresponsible owner, on the other hand, is one who allows his property to fall into disrepair. Over time it becomes run down, no longer suitable for human habitation.

The Bible tells us that our body is a vessel that has been entrusted to our care. We are called to be responsible owners of the body that God has given to us. We must learn how to possess our vessels in sanctification and honour. This means that we must know how to control our body, with all its passions and desires, and direct it in the way of holiness. We must do our best to abstain from sinful or shameful deeds, and actively seek to glorify God and bring honour to His name. If there are areas of our life that need fixing, as responsible owners of our body, we shall do what is necessary to rectify these faults, that it can be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the Master's use (2 Tim 2:21).

This is a responsibility that we must bear throughout our lives. We must continually exercise self-control and discipline over our bodies. Our carnal self-will seek to go the way of the world and indulge in the lusts of the flesh. But with God's grace, we must do all we can to ensure that our body remains a most hospitable abode for the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. We must avoid the “*lust of concupiscence*” (1 Thess 4:5; passions of unbridled desires) which the ungodly pursue after. Instead, we must seek after that which is holy, pure and good. Remember “*that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

THOUGHT: Knowing that our body is not our own, but that we were bought with a price by God – does this make me a more, or less, responsible owner?

PRAYER: Father, help me to possess my vessel in sanctification and honour.

A GODLESS LIFE

1 Thessalonians 4:5 is the second part of a sentence that began in verse 4. It elaborates on what the will of God is – that we must know how to possess the vessel of our body well – in sanctification and honour, and not in the lust of concupiscence like the godless Gentiles.

The phrase “*lust of concupiscence*” literally describes the passions of one’s unbridled or uncontrolled desires. The Greek word for “*lust*” is elsewhere translated as inordinate affection (Col 3:5) or vile affections (Rom 1:26), while the Greek word translated as “*concupiscence*” simply refers to strong desire, often that of a sexual nature (as it clearly is in the context of this verse). The King James translators rightly translated this phrase to describe one’s deviant, sinful immoral desires. One who possesses his vessel in the lust of concupiscence then is someone who freely gives in to such desires, living an unchecked life of lusts and debauchery. He is not in control of himself, but rather allow his passions and desires to take the reins and control him.

Such a life is characteristic of those who do not know God. They do not have the Word of God to guide them, nor the Holy Spirit in them to guide them into all truth. They have no concern about what is morally right in the eyes of God. They are led by their own seared conscience and freely indulge in whatever their passions dictate. There is no desire for purity or sanctification in their lives. Rather, their gods are their sinful lusts, and they do whatever feels right in their own eyes. They live the life of vanity that Solomon once had: “*And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy*” (Eccles 2:10).

While such a life may seem attractive on the surface, we know that it is a life without God. In the end, it is nothing but misery and vanity. All they know is but one fleeting carnal experience after another. They have no assurance of eternity, neither do they have peace in this life. They live aimless, purposeless lives. They do not know God.

THOUGHT: Ignorance is not always bliss.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the privilege of knowing Thee, and having the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17

1 THESSALONIANS 4:6

LEVITICUS 19:9-18

*“That no man go beyond
and defraud his brother...”*

WOULD YOU DEFRAUD A BROTHER?

To “go beyond” (1 Thess 4:6) has the idea of overstepping your boundaries and desire to have more than what you already have. To defraud a brother then is to covet and take that which is not rightfully yours. It is to greedily steal something at your brother’s expense.

A brother is supposed to be someone whom we are close to. Why then would we defraud him? Is that not a terrible betrayal? Yet, that was the warning that Paul had to make, exhorting the Thessalonian Christians that no one should ever think of doing it. Perhaps there were such cases, so Paul had to address the issue to nip it in the bud. Sadly, such things continue to happen in our world today; yes, even among believers.

The root of the problem is selfishness and a lack of love. The mindset of society is “every man for himself.” We are taught that the single most important person that we should care for is ourselves. The world says we must fight for our rights, and do all we can to get ahead, even if it comes at the expense of someone else. It is most tragic when this same mentality is brought into the church.

In church, we are all supposed to be brothers and sisters-in-Christ. We ought to care for one another as family. Christ’s example was one of selfless sacrifice. He came to this earth not for any personal gain or motive, but simply because He loved us and came to give His life as an atonement for our sins. We are taught to love one another in the same way that Christ loves us. Why would we then turn around and defraud a brother? If we do that, we are no better than Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver!

We must ask ourselves: Why do we come to church? Why do we call ourselves Christians? It should be because we love the Lord. Why do we have fellowship? It should be for the good of others, so that we can encourage and edify those around us. If that be the case, then the thought of defrauding a brother should be most abhorrent and repulsive to us.

THOUGHT: Stealing is, in every instance, a sin.

PRAYER: Father, help me to walk in integrity and love.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

1 THESSALONIANS 4:6

ROMANS 12:19-21

*“...the Lord is the avenger
of all such...”*

THE LORD IS THE AVENGER

Sometimes we hear of scammers and conmen who defraud people of large sums of money. They prey on vulnerable, unsuspecting victims, often the elderly or uneducated, and steal all their life savings. By the time they find out about it, these criminals have absconded with the money without a trace, and there is little that the banks or police can do to retrieve the funds. Who will advocate for these people? Will these criminals ever be brought to justice?

Paul sounded a stern warning against any who would seek to defraud a brother – that the Lord is the Avenger of all such. This means that the Lord is the righteous Judge who will mete out just punishments against all who commit such offences. The world’s judicial systems may sometimes be inadequate against such wrongdoings and fail to take these sinners to task. But the assurance here is that God is the all-knowing and all-powerful Judge who will never fail to hold sinners accountable for their sins. As Galatians 6:7 warns: *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”*

To the sinners and defrauders, this should come as a good wake-up call. They must realise that such greedy and exploitative actions are hurtful to others and will not go unnoticed by God. The warning to them is clear: *“ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out”* (Num 32:23).

For those who have been wronged, this truth comes as a comfort to know that God sees and knows all that we are going through. Yes, there may have been grave injustices and hurtful betrayals, but we can rest in the knowledge that God will, in His perfect time, bring about just retribution. We do not have to take action, for we are told *“avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”* (Rom 12:19). Instead of reacting with anger, we repay evil with good, continuing to bear forth a witness for Jesus.

THOUGHT: What is the worst thing that someone has ever done to you?

PRAYER: Father, whenever I am wronged, help me to have the patience to trust in Thy perfect goodness and justice.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19

1 THESSALONIANS 4:7-8

1 PETER 1:13-16

*“...not called us unto uncleanness,
but unto holiness.”*

WE ARE CALLED UNTO HOLINESS

As Christians, we are all called to a life of holiness. When we were saved, we repented of our sins. We realised the terribleness of sin and the need for forgiveness. We learned that only through the Lord Jesus Christ can our sins be washed away, and only in Christ can we hope to stand pure and clean before the thrice holy God. Through Christ, we now have the assurance that we are justified in the sight of God. Our sins have been cleansed and we have the righteousness of Christ covering us. We are now called “*saints*” – holy ones.

Yes, that is a name that all believers are given. To be a saint means that we are made holy, set apart for God and consecrated to His service. It means that we have been given a divine mandate to pursue a life of holiness. We are to put away the filth and sin that we once revelled in and enjoyed, and seek instead to live in obedience to the Word of God. This is the calling that we must now live up to - a calling unto holiness, and not uncleanness.

But how can we live up to this calling? God’s standard for our holiness is that we must be holy, as He is holy. It is a divine calling that God has given to us and cannot be ignored. The promise is that while God’s standards of holiness for us are high, He has also given us the Holy Spirit to guide us (1 Thess 4:8). The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts us of our sins, helps us to understand spiritual things, and guides us into all truth. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, He is the One who empowers us and enables us to flee from temptation and to seek after righteousness.

Let us all therefore yield ourselves to the Spirit’s control. We need God’s grace to enable us to live up to His calling. God has already made us clean through the precious blood of Christ. May 2 Peter 2:22 never apply to us.

THOUGHT: Will God call me to do something that is impossible for me to attain?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the grace to live up to the calling that Thou hast for me to walk in holiness, and not in uncleanness.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20

1 THESSALONIANS 4:8

LUKE 10:1-16

*“...despiseth not man,
but God...”*

WOULD YOU DESPISE GOD?

What an abhorrent idea – that man would despise God! It is a thought so shameful, so detestable, so unimaginable, that Paul sounded out a warning here – anyone who rejects or looks down on the teachings of the Word of God is actually despising God!

The Greek word translated as “*despise*” carries the idea of rejecting something, or to regard it as vain or unimportant. In the context of this verse, the warning is to anyone who rejects the warnings of the previous few verses about the importance of one’s sanctification. Paul reminded his readers how important it was to live a life that was pleasing to God, obeying the commandments of Christ, and fulfilling the will of God, that they might grow in their sanctification. Anyone who rejects these instructions is not just rejecting the teachings of Paul, but he is rejecting God Himself! Jesus gave a similar warning in Luke 10:16 when He sent the disciples out in pairs to preach the Gospel. He told them, “*He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.*” If we reject the servants of Jesus, we are rejecting Jesus the Son of God. And anyone who rejects the Son of God is rejecting God the Father who sent Him.

Sadly, this is happening today. Many have turned their backs on God (2 Pet 3:3). In their arrogance, they deny God’s existence, believing instead that this world came through evolution. They despise any thought of a creator, or an objective moral standard of truth or morality.

May that never be said of us. In fact, it should be the very opposite. We must have only the highest regard for God. We love Him, fear Him, revere Him, and seek to give Him all praise and glory. Because we have such a high view of God, we also have a high view of His Word. All His commandments are taken seriously, and we seek to obey them without question. We shudder at the thought of ever despising God or rejecting His commands. It would be something most unthinkable.

THOUGHT: What audacity, for a creature to despise his Creator.

PRAYER: Father, may I have only the highest regard for Thee, my Master and my Creator.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21

1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-10

ROMANS 12:9-10

*“...ye yourselves are taught of God
to love one another.”*

BROTHERLY LOVE

Time and again, the Scripture tells us that the hallmark of every true believer is to love. God is love, and we love Him because He first loved us. As believers, we have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost (Rom 5:5). Love is the first facet of the fruit of the Spirit that every believer will bear (Gal 5:22). To obey God's commandments is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt 22:37-39).

In addition to that, there is also a more specific love that we must have – “Philadelphia,” that is the love for brethren, or brotherly love. It is a term that refers to the love that one would have for family and close relationships, but by extension is also a term adopted by the New Testament church to speak of the love of fellow believers within the household of God. That is the topic that Paul broached in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10. He praised them for their testimony of brotherly love, for it was evident throughout the churches in Macedonia (eg. Philadelphia, Berea). It must have been something most encouraging for Paul to hear about, to know that this group of new believers had banded together in his absence and was now an example of love not just in their city, but testified of by churches round about them too. He knew that this was not something he could take credit for. He knew that God alone was the One who had taught them how to love.

We too ought to cultivate a love for our fellow brethren, whom we shall be spending eternity with. They are fellow saints, washed and cleansed by Jesus' blood, accepted in the beloved. If God has so freely loved them, surely we can love them as well. In fact, our closest friends ought to be fellow believers for they are the ones who should be able to understand us the most. Unbelievers do not have the same worldview as us, nor are they able to understand our spiritual struggles or provide godly counsel. Our shared experiences in Christ should be what binds us together, for we all have a common purpose to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

THOUGHT: Are my best friends believers or unbelievers?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou place in my heart a love for my fellow brethren, that I may serve Thee effectively in the household of God.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22

1 THESSALONIANS 4:10

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14

“...we beseech you, brethren,
that ye increase more and more.”

ALWAYS ABOUNDING

Paul had commended the Thessalonians for their love a number of times throughout this epistle. In the introduction, he gave thanks to God, remembering their “*labour of love*” (1 Thess 1:3) and exemplary example to the saints in Macedonia and Achaia. Then in chapter 3, Timothy’s report of them highlighted good tidings of their faith and charity (1 Thess 3:6). He also recorded his prayer for them in 1 Thessalonians 3:12 that the Lord would cause them to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men. Finally, in the verses we studied yesterday, Paul commended them for their brotherly love, saying they showed a good understanding of it and did not need any further instruction from him. In fact, so outstanding was their love that it was known in all the churches in Macedonia. Yet, as he praised them, he ended off with an exhortation that they should “*increase more and more*” (1 Thess 4:10). While they were doing well, it did not mean that there was no room for improvement.

There can never be a point in our lives where we can think that we are loving enough. We must never be proud or complacent, or be tempted to rest on our laurels. There will always be areas in our lives that can be improved on, or blind spots which we have not noticed. You may think that you are indeed very loving compared to the people around you, and you may even be right to think that way. Yes, you may, objectively speaking, even be the one who exemplifies love the most in the whole world. But we can never measure up to the love of Christ. That is the yardstick against which we are measured, and which no man can ever surpass.

Let us have the mindset of the Apostle Paul who readily admitted that he had not yet attained to the mark that Christ has set for him, and therefore “*this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:13-14).

THOUGHT: What will happen if I stop trying to increase in love?

PRAYER: Father, may I never stop seeking to abound in love and in my service for Thee.

BE QUIET!

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Paul gave a few simple but practical instructions on how believers ought to conduct themselves before *“them that are without”* (1 Thess 4:12), i.e. people who are outside of the faith. The main idea here is to be conscious of the testimony that we present to the unbelieving world, that we can show forth the love of Christ to them.

First, they were to *“study to be quiet”* (1 Thess 4:11), i.e. they would endeavour to live quiet, peaceful lives. Directly, it means lives that are without conflict or controversy. But it also means that we do not draw unnecessary attention to ourselves. We must not crave the limelight, whether out of pride or being troublemakers. No, our purpose in this life is to point others to Christ, not to ourselves. As John the Baptist wisely said, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:30)!

Second, they were *“to do your own business”* (1 Thess 4:11), i.e. to mind our own business and not be busybodies. We are to refrain from gossiping and rumourmongering, making sure we do not meddle unnecessarily in the lives of others. It is ironic that people so often have many opinions and criticism of others, when their own lives are in a mess. Instead, we are to seek to have constructive, productive lives, focusing on the things that we are called to do. We are to be responsible over our own lives, and ensure that everything is in order, and all our duties are met. This is really the primary purpose we have – that we manage our lives well for the glory of God.

Putting these two thoughts together, we seek simply to be a person who is quietly and unobtrusively working hard in the background, minding his own business, and tending his own business well. He is one who has his life in order and does not feel the need to go around meddling and dabbling unnecessarily in the affairs of others that do not concern him. People will see and respect such a person, and when he finally does speak up and witness for Christ, people will listen.

THOUGHT: Do others see Jesus in me?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou teach me to study to be quiet, and to mind my own business.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24

1 THESSALONIANS 4:11-12

2 THESSALONIANS 3:7-10

*“...and to work with your
own hands...”*

WORK WITH YOUR OWN HANDS

The third part of a good testimony that Paul advised was *“to work with your own hands”* (1 Thess 4:11). This is a rather straightforward instruction that I am sure we can all understand well – to work hard to provide for yourself and your family, and not to be lazy.

Working is a task that predates the fall of man. After the fall, one of the curses that fell upon man was that work would then become harder, that the ground was then cursed, and would bring forth thorns and thistles (Gen 3:17-19). We must remember that Adam already had a job in the Garden of Eden, *“to dress it and to keep it”* (Gen 2:15). God did not create us to be idle. His purpose for us from the very beginning was always for us to work with our hands and to be productive in this life.

In the New Testament, there are instructions and testimonies about the importance of hard work. For example, 1 Timothy 5:8 teaches that we all have the responsibility of providing for our own families: *“if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”* Paul exemplified this on numerous occasions when he worked hard to provide for himself and sometimes his co-labourers as well. Acts 20:34 says, *“Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.”* Laziness is to be avoided, for we are to be *“not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord”* (Rom 12:11).

There is therefore virtue in hard work. Whatever it is that God has called us to, whether as an employee, a business owner, a homemaker, or a student, we must all do our best in whatever God puts in our hands. This is our testimony to the world around us. Like Joseph in Potiphar’s household, it will be evident to all around us that the Lord is with us (Gen 39:2). They will see that we are doing these things not for pride or ambition’s sake, but simply because that is what our Lord has called us to, and that is the moral code that we live by.

THOUGHT: (Read Colossians 3:22.)

PRAYER: Father, remove from me the sin of slothfulness and help me to be zealous in whatever work Thou hast called me to.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25

1 THESSALONIANS 4:12

1 PETER 2:11-12

*“That ye may walk honestly
toward them that are without...”*

OUR TESTIMONY TO THOSE WITHOUT

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Paul was addressing a particular problem that was plaguing the church at Thessalonica, an issue he would later have to deal more with in 2 Thessalonians 3. It seemed that there were some among them who were lazy, not working to support themselves, and were going around causing problems in the church. With free time on their hands, instead of quietly serving the Lord, they were “*busybodies*,” possibly spending their time gossiping and creating strife in the church. This would have been problematic not just within the church community, but it likely affected the testimony of the church to those outside as well. He explained that the purpose in correcting these troublemakers was that they would walk honestly to them that were without (outside), and that they would be self-sufficient, lacking nothing.

As believers, we must realise the importance of our testimony to the outside world. Many people may never step foot into a church all their lives. But they may come into contact with people who call themselves Christians. The manner of our walk is therefore crucial. They may not want to hear the words of the Gospel, but they should be able to see Christ through our lives and our conduct. A walk that pleases God, is also a walk that testifies for the Lord. This is what it means to be lights shining for the Lord. Through our good works, those who see us may glorify our Father which is in heaven (Matt 5:16). When we work hard, live lives of honesty and integrity, we show forth a shining testimony for the Lord.

But if we are lazy, disinterested and not performing to our potential, we bring shame to the name of the Lord whom we claim to serve. We cannot claim to repent of our sins and follow a righteous God, yet live irresponsible lives that even unbelievers disapprove of. If that was so, why would they want to listen to our Gospel or come to our church? Let us all seek to have our “*conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation*” (1 Pet 2:12).

THOUGHT: The preacher’s best sermon is his life. Do I agree?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou use me as a light shining brightly for Thee.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-8

*“...that ye sorrow not, even as
others which have no hope.”*

HOPE AND SORROW

It is never easy to go through the death of a loved one. We will cherish memories of them but know that no more new ones can be made with them. Naturally responding with deep grief and sorrow, we go through a period of mourning. The sadness may fade but will never entirely go away.

However, when it comes to the death of a believer, in the midst of our sorrow, we can have hope. Paul understood that, which is why the exhortation here is not that we are not allowed to sorrow, but that in the midst of our sorrow, we are not to do so as if there is no hope.

Continuing with the gist of the letter, Paul then entered into a rather doctrinal section concerning the second coming of the Lord. He addressed the concern of some in the church who had recently lost their loved ones and were unsure of what their fate would be. This was probably one aspect of the faith that Paul did not have an opportunity to instruct them fully on. Therefore he then wrote about the return of Christ and the promise of the resurrection of the saints.

Paul exhorted them not to be ignorant concerning those who were “*asleep*” (1 Thess 4:13). This was because they were Christians who would be resurrected one day. Like someone who sleeps, they will soon awake and be alive again. While there is a cause for grief, it should not spiral into hopeless despair. Instead, while we mourn, there should also be the confidence that their souls are presently in heaven with God and at the coming of Christ, they will be resurrected with a glorified body and we shall all be reunited for eternity.

This is the glorious hope that all Christians have. We are certain that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. We have the wonderful hope to know that death separates us only temporarily. We will meet again one day, and it will be a meeting that has no end.

THOUGHT: Sorrow and hope are not contrasting, but complementary responses to death.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the blessed hope and wonderful assurance that I can have in Christ.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-23

“...if we believe that Jesus
died and rose again...”

JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN!

The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the very foundation of the Gospel. We must believe in these two key facts about Christ in order to be saved. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 very succinctly explain these thoughts: “...*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.*” In dying on the cross at Calvary, Jesus took the punishment of sin on our behalf. He received the wages of sin, which is death, and through that He made an atonement of sin for us. He was perfect and innocent, and did not deserve this death. Yet, it was a willing sacrifice that was made, whereby He laid down His life for our sakes.

But Jesus did not remain dead. On the third day, God the Father raised Him from the dead, demonstrating the fact that He had accepted the sacrifice of Christ and granted Him victory over death. Jesus is described as the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Cor 15:20). This means that He was the first to be risen from the dead with the glorified body, and like the first fruit that appears on a tree, it signals the fact that there are more to come. Through Christ, we can now have the hope of resurrection.

The promise then is that for those who believe that Jesus died and rose again from the dead, if they were to sleep (that is to say they die in Christ), they will one day be awoken to receive the same glorified, resurrected body that Christ has. That is the promise of the resurrection.

This is the wonderful promise of hope that Paul wanted every believer to be assured of. This is what we commemorate every year at Easter. We remember the death of Jesus on Good Friday, and on Easter Sunday, we celebrate the fact that Jesus rose again from the dead, and is now alive! Because He is living, we can declare together with Paul: “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor 15:55-57).

THOUGHT: Am I afraid of death?

PRAYER: Father, I praise Thee for the wonderful redemption plan, that through Christ's death and resurrection, I have the hope of eternal life.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28

1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17

ACTS 1:6-11

*“...the Lord himself shall descend
from heaven with a shout...”*

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

In the days before going to the cross, Jesus spoke at length with His disciples, preparing them for the day of His departure, but also leaving them with the promise of His return. He told them in John 14:2-3: *“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”* He was speaking of going to die on the cross, such that through His death and resurrection, He could pave the way for their salvation. But He also promised that He was coming again to receive them unto Himself. As Jesus ascended into heaven, two men in white apparel, possibly angels, told the disciples: *“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11).

Since then, believers have been looking forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Paul offered a further tantalising glimpse of what would happen at the Lord’s return. This is the first of a series of events relating to the Lord’s return. What is described here is Jesus’ return for the saints as He comes in the clouds in mid-air to receive the dead in Christ and the living saints. However, He does not come all the way to earth. That will happen only seven years later at the end of the Great Tribulation.

Paul explained that it will be a sudden glorious event. It will begin with a triumphant shout from heaven, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God sounding. In the Old Testament, trumpets were used not only to call for the people to gather, but also to signal victory in triumph. Perhaps both thoughts are evident here, as all believers are called to meet the Lord in the air, and victory over sin and death is declared. All who have died in Christ will rise in their glorified bodies, and the living saints will be raptured, all to meet in a victorious reunion in the clouds of the air. Then the beginning of the end has come. The Lord calls to the church and says, *“Your time is up, your work is done! Come, let us celebrate and rejoice!”*

THOUGHT: Am I genuinely looking forward to the Lord’s return?

PRAYER: *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”* (Rev 22:20)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29

1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-58

“...we which are alive and remain
shall be caught up...”

RAPTURE!

An authoritative shout booms across the world, joined by an ethereal voice and a most triumphant sound of a mighty trumpet. Bodies suddenly disappear from morgues and funeral parlours. A moment later, many of the living vanish as well. Chaos ensues. What has happened? The rapture has taken place!

This is the event that Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. At the Lord's return, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then those which are alive and remain shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. It will all happen suddenly, *“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”* (1 Cor 15:52).

The term rapture is a word of French and Latin origin, meaning to be caught up, snatched up by force. It is a most vivid term to describe what will happen to believers at the moment of the Lord's return. There will be this sudden, miraculous power that will physically transport all believers, both dead and alive, into the clouds and transform them instantly into their immortal, incorruptible bodies, the same glorified body that Jesus had after His resurrection. For us, that will be the start of eternity. Our time in this world as we know it will end, and eternity with the Lord will begin. Henceforth, we shall be perfectly sinless, able to enjoy perfect communion with the Lord.

This is the promise that all believers look forward to. We do not know when it will happen, but we know it is soon. We must continue to be watchful and ready for the Lord's return. For the unbelievers who are left behind, it will be a shocking event with major repercussions that would be felt all around the world. But that will only be the beginning of sorrows for them, for the Great Tribulation shall soon follow, as the world will be judged one final time by the Lord. Do not be caught unawares and unready. Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today!

THOUGHT: Can the world explain away the rapture when it happens?

PRAYER: Father, help me to watch and pray, and to always be ready for the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 30

1 THESSALONIANS 4:17-18

REVELATION 21:4

*"...so shall we ever
be with the Lord."*

THE COMFORT OF ETERNITY

The final stanza of John Newton's famous hymn "Amazing Grace" has a beautiful description of eternity:

*When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we first begun.*

This is a thought that surpasses human comprehension for we are beings locked in time. We count our moments in minutes, hours, days, years. That has always been our human experience. However, once eternity begins, it will be different. We do not have to number our days anymore, for we will live forever, eternally in the presence of God and His saints.

This is an especially meaningful comfort in light of the sorrow that some of the Thessalonian Christians were experiencing because of the death of their loved ones. Amid their grief, they could look forward to a day when there will be no more death, sorrow, tears or pain, for these former things are passed away (Rev 21:4). In eternity, we shall all be reunited and there will no longer be the anguish of parting. In our resurrected bodies, there is no sin and therefore no punishment of death. Much more than that, we can enjoy perfect communion with God. "*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*" (Rev 21:3). These were thoughts that Paul shared in order that they might comfort one another with these words.

How about for us? Is this the eternal comfort of hope that you look forward to? Is the thought of spending eternity with God in heaven something that fills you with great peace, assurance and joy? If we truly believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose again for our justification, then surely, we are assured of our eternal salvation. We will know that our time on earth is but a temporary sojourn. We are just pilgrims passing through, and our eternal dwelling place is in heaven with God.

THOUGHT: Knowing there is a definitive and imminent end, how then should I live?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the wonderful hope of eternity that Thou hast promised!

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-2

MATTHEW 24:42-51

*“...the day of the Lord so cometh
as a thief in the night.”*

AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT!

While Jesus was on earth He taught His disciples an important lesson: *“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”* (Matt 24:42-44). That is the same message that Paul wanted to convey when he wrote that *“the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.”* It will happen unexpectedly, unannounced, and much of the world will be unprepared.

The day of the Lord’s return is imminent. That is why prophecy has been given to us. On the one hand, we do not have every single detail of the times and the seasons such that we can predict the exact time and date of the Lord’s return – that has never been God’s purpose for us. Yet, enough has been revealed so that every generation of believers would be watchful and ready for when the Lord should come.

Although both 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 deal with the topic of the Lord’s return, the emphasis is different. The former was written to comfort troubled believers, whereas the latter is a warning to unbelievers, and as one commentator puts it: to trouble comfortable believers. Which category are you in? Does the prospect of Christ’s soon return bring you hope and comfort or fearful trepidation?

Our response then, must be one of watchfulness. We do not want to be caught unprepared. Just as a thief may come when we least expect it, we must always be ready. We cannot afford to be complacent and let our guard down. We must be spiritually vigilant, walking close to the Lord and actively serving Him. The right understanding of biblical prophecy will lead to a life of faith and godliness. Knowing that our time on earth is limited, we ought to then redouble our efforts to serve and witness for God, looking for and hasting unto the coming day of God (2 Pet 3:12).

THOUGHT: What would happen if we were told the exact day of the Lord’s return?

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to be watchful, ready for the Lord’s return.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

1 THESSALONIANS 5:3

MATTHEW 24:37-39

*“...they shall say,
Peace and safety...”*

A COMPLACENT WORLD

The Lord's return will come when the world least expects it. It will be like it was in the days of Noah. As Jesus warned His disciples, it will be like the days before the flood where *“they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away”* (Matt 24:38-39). Although Noah, who was *“a preacher of righteousness”* (2 Pet 2:5), had warned the people of the impending judgment, it all fell upon deaf ears. No one believed that any sort of divine global judgment would happen, and as a result they all perished in the flood.

In like manner, the world will continue to cry *“Peace and safety”* (1 Thess 5:3), ignoring the warnings that the Bible has about the Lord's soon return. All around the world, world leaders meet for talks about how to bring about world peace and build a sustainable future. There is a general sense of optimism projected by politicians, all promising to lead their nations to a better, more prosperous future. Much has been said in celebrating the “indomitable human spirit” that will persevere through any adversity it faces. In their minds, nothing, not even a global judgment from God Himself will be able to defeat mankind. All in all, there seems to be this false sense of security that the world has, expecting things to just continue as they are, indefinitely. This is the clarion call of the world today, what Paul described as the cry of *“Peace and safety.”*

If the world does not turn to Christ, there will never be true peace or safety. The world will continue to be in constant strife because of sin, and one is never safe from Satan's snares. There will never be peace, because man remains in rebellion against God. Only through repentance and faith in Christ can man be reconciled to God and find true peace. As believers, we must never become too comfortable in this world or be so caught up in the world system. We must never try to find fulfilment here. The world will continue in its complacency. Do not be like the world.

THOUGHT: *“There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.”*

(Isa 48:22)

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that Thou art my refuge and my strength, and in Thee I can trust.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

1 THESSALONIANS 5:3

REVELATION 16

*“...as travail upon
a woman with child;
and they shall not escape.”*

THEY SHALL NOT ESCAPE

To the world that is crying “*Peace and safety*,” and complacently and irreverently pursuing their kingdoms on this earth, a stark warning is given. There will be a sudden destruction that will come upon them, and there will be no escape.

Paul was referring to the events of Jesus’ second coming. It begins with the rapture of the church (1 Thess 5:3) and continues with the seven-year Great Tribulation, “*such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be*” (Matt 24:21). This will be a time of unprecedented calamity and destruction that will fall upon the remaining inhabitants of the earth. The Antichrist, empowered by Satan, will reign over the whole world. It will be a time of unimaginable sufferings, as sinful man is judged by the righteous God (Rev 16:5-7).

The analogy that Paul used is that of a woman with child. The word “*travail*” (1 Thess 5:3) is a term that specifically refers to the birth pangs related to childbirth. It is the pains that a woman experiences as she starts to have contractions, signalling the fact that she has gone into labour. As the labour progresses, the contractions start to become more frequent and more intense, and that is the sure sign that the birth will be soon. Just as how the sudden onset of painful contractions is an unavoidable part of childbirth, so will sudden destruction come upon the earth, and there is nothing that the world can do to stop it. Once the Tribulation begins, there is a set course to follow: the seven seal, trumpet and vial judgments that are described in the book of Revelation. The intensity of sufferings will escalate as the judgments are poured down one after another, just as travails upon a woman with child.

It is a fate most terrifying, not one that any of us would want to go through. We would also not want any of our friends, loved ones, no, not even our enemies, to experience this fate. While there is yet time, let us warn all those around us to repent and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ!

THOUGHT: Destruction or resurrection? The choice is clear!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy abundant grace and mercy that save me from the destruction that I deserve.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

1 THESSALONIANS 5:4-5

EPHESIANS 5:8-14

*“Ye are all the children of light
and the children of the day.”*

ARE YOU A CHILD OF LIGHT?

1 John 5:7 states that *“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 5:7). When Jesus was on earth, He declared, *“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”* (John 8:12). Throughout Scripture, darkness is characterised as the domain of sin and Satan, whereas light is the domain of God. As believers we have been *“called out of darkness into his marvellous light”* (1 Pet 2:9); and Paul’s role as an evangelist was *“to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God”* (Acts 26:18).

Therefore, to be a child of light is to be a child of God. Paul referred to them as *“brethren”* and counted himself as one of them by using the first-person pronouns *“we”* and *“us.”* He wanted them to understand the significance of their identity in Christ, that as children of light, they were to be characterised by the light. They ought to walk in the light of the Lord, and not in the darkness of Satan.

As believers, we too must understand our role as children of light and as children of the day. We have been enlightened by the truth of God and are no longer groping in the darkness of sin. We know the Gospel; we know that through Christ our sins have been forgiven. Our lives must therefore be characterised by righteousness and holiness. We must walk as children of light, and *“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”* (Eph 5:11).

Furthermore, we must seek to share the light. We are the light of the world that must not be hid. We must *“let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 5:16). When we walk as children of light, we shine forth as testimonies for the Lord Jesus Christ, bringing much needed illumination to a world lost in the darkness of sin. Then others can be led to God’s truth, and in turn become children of light themselves.

THOUGHT: “In this world of darkness we must shine. You in your small corner, and I in mine.”

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me always to shine forth for Thee.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

1 THESSALONIANS 5:4-5

1 JOHN 1:5-10

“...not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”

ARE YOU A CHILD OF DARKNESS?

A child of darkness is everything that a child of light is not. Darkness is the absence of light. A child of darkness is one who does not have the light of Christ shining in his life. He is lost in the darkness of sin without the light of Christ to guide him. In that state of darkness, he cannot comprehend the light (John 1:4-5), nor does he have any desire to come to the light. This is the sad state of one who is lost in darkness. John 3:19-20 tells us that *“men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.”*

Children of darkness know nothing but a life of sin. This is not to say that every single one of them are hardened criminals committing terribly immoral deeds. However, because they do not know God, everything they do is a deed of darkness. Nothing that they do can ever be for the glory of God. Their lives are all geared towards the fulfilment of self. As Paul explained in Romans 3:10-11: *“There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”*

That is why it was important for Paul to remind the Thessalonians that *“ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.”* The warning for those who are in darkness is, *“that day should overtake you as a thief.”* They are the ones who complacently assume all is *“Peace and safety,”* and they will be caught by surprise at the return of Christ. As unbelievers, they will have no part in the rapture but will be left behind to face the Great Tribulation. That is the sad fate of the children of darkness.

For us, we must be very sure that we are indeed children of light, and not children of darkness. Read John’s warning to us in 1 John 1:5-6. Let us be sure to walk in the light, as Christ is the Light.

THOUGHT: I am either in the dark or in the light. There is no dusk or dawn, no shades of grey.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to be very certain that I am truly a child of light, and not a child of darkness.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

1 THESSALONIANS 5:6-8

ROMANS 13:11-14

*“...let us not sleep,
as do others...”*

WAKE UP!

Sleep is something everyone is familiar with. We do it every night. God designed our bodies to produce hormones that cause us to be sleepy when darkness descends, and then to wake up the next day when it is bright. Continuing the analogy of darkness and light, Paul used the idea of sleep as a metaphor for the spiritual lethargy or slackness that believers sometimes lapse into. But it is not a normal state to be in. Those who are of the day should not be found asleep. We should instead be awake and alert, ready for whatever the day brings.

Yet there are times when we are found napping in the day. Spiritually, it would be when we grow complacent, and are found doing the works of darkness. Although we should rightfully be *“of the day,”* yet sometimes our lives are characteristic of those who *“sleep in the night,”* as we are found in spiritual slumber. We get so caught up by the things of the world that we become spiritually apathetic and lethargic. Like one who is sleeping, we are insensitive to the spiritual realm around us. We develop a great sluggishness towards spiritual things, for we care not for the things of God, but seek after the sins of the world.

Dear Christian, is that a description of you? Are you lost in the world, pursuing the things of the world? Are you wilfully sinning without any thought of repentance? Have you been slack in your service and witness for the Lord? It is time to stop sleeping and to wake up! It is not normal to be found sleeping in the day while it is bright outside. Only the slothful or sick do so. Believers should never be in such a state of spiritual stupor. We need a strong wake-up call to shock us out of our slumber and spur us on in our devotion and service to God. As Romans 13:11-12 declares: *“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”* Will you wake up?

THOUGHT: What would be an effective spiritual wake-up call?

PRAYER: Father, may I never be found in spiritual slumber, but be always awake, ready to do Thy bidding.

BE ALERT!

After we wake up each day, the challenge is for us to keep awake. There are times when, even after we wake up, we still feel very drowsy. Yet we know that it is time to wake up and get on with our day. Therefore, we do whatever is necessary to get going. Whether it is a cold shower, a hot coffee, or some exercise, we would do whatever it takes because we know it is important to stay awake.

In like manner, after we awake out of our spiritual slumber, it is critical that we never lapse back into sleep. Therefore, the call is for us to “*watch and be sober*” (1 Thess 5:6). To watch is to be awake, vigilant and attentive. To be sober is to be temperate, in control of our mental faculties, and not drunk. This is the state that believers must continually be in. Like good soldiers, we must be ready for imminent threats, always prepared to respond. As spiritual soldiers in the Lord's army, we must remain watchful and sober, ready to stand firm against the wiles of the Devil.

Surely, we do not want to be like the disciples that accompanied Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. They were told to sit there and be alert for any threats while Jesus went to pray. However, three times, Jesus found them asleep. Disappointed, He questioned them: “*What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*” (Matt 26:40). We do well to take heed of Jesus' exhortation: “*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Matt 26:41).

By application, one who is not watchful is one who lapses into spiritual stupor, or is like one who is drunk. A drunkard is one who has his senses dulled, is no longer in control and prone to foolish behaviour. People who are drunk seldom admit that they are drunk, and often do reckless things that they would later regret. That is a state that we never want to find ourselves in. We cannot afford to be complacent. We must do all we can to remain spiritually watchful and vigilant. Let us pray without ceasing to have the discernment to be aware of the spiritual dangers that surround us.

THOUGHT: A soldier will never let his guard down.

PRAYER: Father, help me to watch and pray!

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

1 THESSALONIANS 5:6-8

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

“...putting on the breastplate
of faith and love...”

GET DRESSED!

To further extend the metaphor, one more step that one does after waking up and getting ready for the day is to get dressed. Each morning, we get changed into clothes that are suitable for the day, ready for whatever activity it is that we have planned. As responsible adults, we know the importance of dressing appropriately. We do not turn up for work in our pyjamas, neither do we hit the gym with a suit and tie.

The spiritual garb that we (who are of the light and of the day) ought to put on must be suitable armaments that equip us for the spiritual warfare. It is “*the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation*” (1 Thess 5:8). These are the “work clothes” that we need to be an effective soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ. The two items of the armour of God that Paul chose to highlight are necessary aspects of our Christian life that enable us to watch and be sober as children of the day.

First, there is “*the breastplate of faith and love*” that protects our heart and directs it towards Christ. Having faith and love is what motivates our work of faith and labour of love. It enables us to live for Christ and labour for Him. Because we trust Him and love Him, we shall not lapse back into sleep, but will seek to obey His Word and do all for the glory of God.

Then, on the head is the helmet of the hope of salvation. Hope is what protects and aligns our mind and thoughts, directing us to set our affections on the coming of the Lord with the patience of hope. This prevents us from being caught up with the cares and worries of the world. Instead, we look forward to the fruition of our salvation, of eternity in heaven with God. Confident in our hope of salvation, we will not be distracted by the dazzling temptations that abound, but we will look always to Christ in all things.

Protected with the armour of faith, love and hope, we will be able to watch and be sober, and stand firm against the wiles of the Devil.

THOUGHT: Do I have the work of faith, labour of love and patience of hope in my Lord Jesus Christ? (1 Thess 1:3)

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to be strong in the power of Thy might.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

1 THESSALONIANS 5:9

ROMANS 5:6-10

*“For God hath not appointed
us to wrath...”*

SAVED FROM WRATH

While the main gist of this section is to warn about the coming day of the Lord and the need to be prepared, yet it ends with a note of assurance for believers. Paul reminds us that the return of the Lord is not an event to be feared, but one to look forward to. If we are children of light, God has not appointed us unto wrath, for that is what the children of darkness will face. Instead, the promise is that we are appointed to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The reason for this privilege is simple yet profound. Through the great love and mercy of God, He has spared us from the judgment that we deserve. With the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, our sins have been forgiven. *“Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him”* (Rom 5:9). Jesus endured the wrath of God on the cross at Calvary so that we no longer have to face that wrath. This is what it means for Christ to have been the propitiation for our sins – that through the sacrifice of Christ, the wrath of God has been appeased. *“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:10). Therefore, by His grace and through His love, we are free from the judgment of the wrath of God and from eternal damnation in hell because of our sins.

Instead of wrath, we look forward to the promise of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. When He returns for His bride, all that are in Christ will be snatched away from the judgments of the Great Tribulation, described as *“the great day of his wrath”* (Rev 6:17). We will be granted that glorified resurrected body, a body that we will have for all of eternity. We will be saved to the uttermost, not through any merit of our own, but because of all that Christ has done for us on the cross at Calvary.

Therefore, as we ponder the return of Christ, know that it is a day to celebrate, and not to dread. It is a time when we shall experience the grace of God, and not His judgment. We will obtain salvation, and not wrath.

THOUGHT: It is a terrifying thing to face the wrath of God.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that I have been saved from wrath through the Lord Jesus Christ.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

1 THESSALONIANS 5:10

PHILIPPIANS 1:20-26

*“...whether we wake or sleep,
we should live together with him.”*

LIFE IN CHRIST

To be a Christian means that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But far more than just having an intellectual assent to the facts of the Gospel, we place our complete trust in the Lord and begin a life of faith in Christ. It is a lifelong relationship whereby we now enjoy a blessed union with Christ. It does not end when we die, but continues through all of eternity, for *“whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him”!*

Note that the sleep here is not referring to the spiritual slumber or slackness that Paul warned against in verse 6. Rather it concerns those who *“sleep in Jesus”* as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, referring to believers who are dead in Christ and who will be received into glory.

The promise is certain because Jesus has already died for us. Through His sacrifice, we do not have to face eternal death and damnation in hell, because He has paid the penalty for our sins. Instead, we can now enjoy the blessings of salvation, both in this life and in the life to come.

Therefore, every believer can presently enjoy this blessed relationship with Christ. It means that we are daily in communion with Him through prayer and the reading of God's Word. It means that we are assured of His abiding presence in our lives and can rest in the promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Daily, we behold His beauty and revel in His goodness. We know that our lives are in His care, and there is nothing more that we need or want.

Yet, all these are but a foretaste of what is to come in eternity. Then, we shall be with Christ in person, which Paul said is *“far better”* (Phil 1:23). We will be freed from any sin that separates us from God and can come fully into His presence. We can enjoy full and complete communion with Christ without the things of the world to distract us and turn us away from Him. Is this a prospect that excites you? Only if we live with Christ in the present, will we look forward to death as a gain.

THOUGHT: Is Christ my everlasting delight?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the gift of Thy son Jesus who died for me, that whether I wake or sleep, I can live together with Him.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

HEBREWS 10:24-25

*“...comfort yourselves together,
and edify one another...”*

EDIFY ONE ANOTHER

When we study the doctrines concerning the future return of Jesus, it must have practical implications for us in the present. The Bible gives us these glimpses into the future not so we can satiate a curiosity, or to pique some academic fascination. It must be applied to our lives and provoke us in the present to occupy till the Lord Jesus returns.

As Paul concluded this section, he ended with an instruction to the believers. In light of all that he had discussed concerning the rapture and the day of the Lord, they were to *“comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”* Both these verbs are imperatives in the present tense, meaning these are commands that believers must continually obey, exhorting one another in the Lord.

To comfort one another is to come alongside someone and exhort or call him. In this context, it is to call them to look to Christ, reminding them of all that Christ has done for them, and then to exhort them to live for Christ. This is a comfort in light of the Lord’s return, for it grants us certainty that there is meaning to our life in the present. There is hope that we look forward to, knowing that Christ will soon return to take us to glory.

To edify is a construction term meaning to build up, for example, a structure or a building. Spiritually speaking, it means that we actively seek to build up one another’s spiritual lives. Through our mutual support and edification, we help one another to grow in the Lord. As fellow saints, we must seek to encourage one another towards greater service for God, to seek to provoke one another unto love and good works, and as Hebrews 10:25 says, *“so much the more, as ye see the day (of the Lord) approaching.”* The knowledge that the Lord is coming soon should, all the more, motivate us to do what we can while there is still time. Together, as we comfort and edify one another, we can all grow together in the Lord and be ready for His return.

THOUGHT: Does my presence in the lives of the people around me draw them closer to, or push them further away from, the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for bringing people into my lives who have helped to encourage me, and build me up in the faith.

LEADERS MUST LABOUR

Verse 12 begins a new section, in which Paul gave some final instructions and exhortations before concluding with a benediction. In verses 12 to 15, he addressed the relationship between the church and her leaders and how they ought to relate to and serve one another. We want to first look at the responsibilities of the leaders, focusing today on the line “*them which labour among you.*”

The word “*labour*” carries the idea of hard, tiring work. It is very involved labour, possibly leading one to work to the point of exhaustion. One who labours is one who gives his full effort in fulfilling the tasks that are set before him. He has a strong work ethic and will diligently spend and be spent for the cause he is focused on. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all servants of the Lord could be described in such terms?

Anyone who is engaged in the Lord's service should be hard at work for Him. Sometimes, the perception of pastors and full-time ministers is that they have a very easy job, working just one day in seven, having Mondays to Saturdays free to do whatever they want. This could not be further from the truth. True, there are some who are lazy, recycling old sermons or just copying from others. This should really not be the case. Pastors, of all people, must be the most hardworking, giving themselves “*continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*” (Acts 6:4). This is their calling which must never be taken lightly.

In fact, all true servants of the Lord (not just pastors, but all leaders) ought to be fully engaged in labouring for the Lord, daily toiling hard in the Lord's vineyard! To be a leader in a church is no small task. If one calls himself a leader, he must be prepared to labour hard, to give of his time, energy and effort to serve his Lord and Master! These are indeed what we see in the examples of men of faith in the Bible, and in records of great men in church history. Is it evident in our church today? Are we ready and willing to give of our best to our Master?

THOUGHT: Am I serving the Lord? Am I labouring (hard) for Him?

PRAYER: Let me burn out for Thee, dear Father, burn and wear out for Thee; don't let me rust, or my life be a failure, my God to Thee.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12

1 PETER 5:1-3

“...and are over you
in the Lord...”

LEADERS MUST LEAD

The next responsibility we want to focus on is that leaders must lead, as evident in the next line in the verse “*and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you*” (1 Thess 5:12). Yes, it goes without saying that this is a core responsibility of leaders, as the name itself suggests. There are good leaders that rule well, but sadly also unbiblical and irresponsible leaders who care more for themselves than for the flock. These are the ones whom Jesus denounced as “*hireling(s)*” (John 10:12).

The Greek word translated as “*over you*” has the literal meaning of “those who stand in front of you.” In describing church leaders, it depicts representatives of the church as being accountable for the spiritual well-being of those under their charge. They are the ones standing in front taking the lead, taking on the responsibilities of spiritual governance and guidance of the people. They are to do so only in the Lord, and not according to their own human wisdom. They are not to wield power as despotic leaders with an authoritarian rule, but to lead by example. Through their testimony, they ought to inspire the people to follow them, but only insofar as they follow Christ.

An important part of biblical leadership is the ministry of admonition – to caution or warn. This is the right exercise of church discipline. Leaders are to be as watchmen, sounding the alarm when danger comes. They are to be observant and careful, to point out sin and to rebuke the flock when necessary. This involves preaching over the pulpit, as well as individual counselling and informal friendly rebuke. In order to effectively admonish the flock, the leader must know his flock well. He must understand their spiritual needs and struggles, and the temptations that they are facing. Then with godly wisdom, he must broach the topic in a sensitive and tactful manner, always having the spiritual well-being of his members at heart. It is often an unpleasant and difficult task, but nonetheless a very necessary one.

THOUGHT: Having the right leaders can make or break a church.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou strengthen and equip my church leaders that they will faithfully serve Thee according to Thy will.

SUBMIT TO YOUR LEADERS

As much as we desire to have good, godly leaders who labour, lead well and exercise church discipline, we must on our part learn to be good members. Logically, leaders must have people that are willing to be led. It is no point having the best leaders, if those who are supposed to be under them refuse to submit. Therefore, as we look at Paul's instruction to know them which *"are over you in the Lord, and admonish you,"* there are important applications that can be made for the church member.

Understand that a church is made up of people. Every local church is a body of believers, a gathering of Christians who meet for the common aim of worshipping and serving God together. For a church to be healthy and effective, the people must work together with the same desire to seek God and to edify one another in the Lord. A healthy church is one where every person fulfils his role in serving God, whether he is called to serve as a leader or as a member. They must do their part well, all for the glory of God.

As members of a church, we must acknowledge the spiritual responsibility that the leaders have over our souls, as spiritual shepherds that care for the well-being of their flock. The role of the member (and part of every member's membership vow) is to submit to their leadership and authority of the church leaders. It is not always easy. But if we trust that our leaders are divinely appointed to their office, called by God, then we can submit to them as unto the Lord. It is something that we must see as a biblical mandate, and not just something we do based on our subjective wants and wishes.

Of course, on the part of the leaders, they must be careful that they do not intrusively try to dictate every aspect of their members' lives. They are not to abuse this power, nor take advantage of the godly submission of the members. They are to rule with the fear of the Lord, always guided by God's Word.

THOUGHT: How will I respond if I am admonished for sins that I have committed?

PRAYER: Father, may I have a humble heart, one ready to submit.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

1 THESSALONIANS 5:13

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-20

*“...esteem them very highly
in love...”*

ESTEEM YOUR LEADERS

In any healthy church, there needs to be a group of responsible and diligent leaders who serve well. However, their labour is not always appreciated. Sadly, they are sometimes even despised and maligned because of their faithful service to the Lord. People do not like it when they are admonished or disciplined and have their sins pointed out. Sometimes, the biblical, godly decision may be an unpopular one and people get offended. In theory, everyone would want a hardworking and faithful pastor, but are we really prepared for the biblical exhortations and decisions that come from such a pastor? Paul's exhortation to the brethren is that they must know and esteem such godly leaders.

To know involves knowledge in the intellectual sense, i.e. to know who they are and the nature of their ministry. This is basic human courtesy and respect. However, knowing someone goes further than that. It should be on a more personal and intimate level where there is an established relationship. Church members are to see their pastors as people they can trust and confide in, and have a healthy respect for. After all, pastors are also human, and they need friends and encouragement as well. They care deeply about your soul; do you care for them as well?

Then, we are to *“esteem them very highly in love”*. The leaders are to be respected for their work's sake. We ought to love our pastors and honour them for their labour in the Lord. We must remember that they are doing the Lord's work, called to serve Him in a full-time capacity. It is often a thankless task and sometimes looked down upon. This should not be the case! We should respect these faithful servants of the Lord. Yet this esteem must be a genuine one, borne out of love and not just a façade we put up. It should come naturally as a result of knowing them, for if we truly understand their heart for the Lord and the congregation that has been placed in their care, then we would be sincerely thankful for what they have been called to do and respect them for it.

THOUGHT: When was the last time I showed appreciation to my pastor and church leaders?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the leaders that Thou hast called into Thy service. Help me to esteem them highly in love.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15

*“Warn them that are unruly,
comfort the feebleminded.”*

DEALING WITH THE DIFFICULT

In any local church, there will be all sorts of people that come in through its doors. They bring with them their broken hearts, troubled spirits, and sinful pasts. Many of them are trying to find peace and comfort, and a solution to the problem of sin that plagues their souls. As a church, do we know how to help in the right way, such that they can come to Christ and find the solution to all their woes?

In verse 14, Paul described various groups of potentially difficult people and briefly explained how the church ought to deal with them. Note that he addressed the *“brethren,”* and not just the church leaders. First, he exhorted them concerning the *“unruly.”* This is a military term used to describe soldiers who do not keep in rank. These are the people walking disorderly (2 Thess 3:6), who are in sin, having deviated from that which is moral and upright. The church is called to admonish them, to warn them of their disobedience and direct them to Christ. If they are unbelievers, part of the Gospel presentation is to warn them of the seriousness of sin and the need for repentance. If they are believers, as fellow brothers and sisters-in-Christ, the church must have the courage to sound this important warning and restore them in their walk with God. It is indeed selfish and unloving to see a brother who is unruly, and remain silent!

Next, there are those who are *“feebleminded”* or fainthearted. This refers to those who are timid or who are discouraged by various circumstances. They are those who are weaker in their faith, and may not be so assured of the promises of God. When problems arise in their lives, they are easily shaken and may doubt God and be full of anxiety and cares. They would require more encouragement and support. The church must be on the lookout for such ones and direct them to look to God and His Word. It will not be easy, and may not always yield immediate results, but it is necessary and must be done in love. It will require much energy, time and effort, and further follow-up in the future. Yet, this is what we must do for one another as we seek to comfort one another.

THOUGHT: Which is harder – warning or comforting?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the love and compassion for those who are struggling and lost.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14

1 JOHN 3:16-18

*“...support the weak,
be patient toward all men.”*

SUPPORT THE WEAK

Every believer has the moral responsibility to show forth the love of Christ to the people around them. Particularly within the church, within the household of faith, we are called to do good, to help those who are weak. This is what Paul was advocating here in this final clause, that we must *“support the weak, be patient toward all men.”*

The weak here refers to those who are physically infirmed, of the elderly and sick, or of those who have particular physical needs or difficulties. These are often the marginalised and downtrodden in society, struggling to help themselves with little help to turn to.

Our duty is to support such people - to help them through their struggles and do what we can to alleviate their sufferings. As 1 John 3:17 warns, *“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”* If we say that we have the love of God, then surely, we would be more than willing to help a brother or sister-in-Christ in need.

Yet we must know that the support we render must be more than just physical. While aiding them materially, we must also have a focus on their spiritual needs. We would do well to point them to Christ and remind them of the goodness and providence of God. Our desire must be that their faith be strengthened through their trial, that they may be better witnesses for the Lord.

All these would require much patience. As we seek to show love in these practical ways, we must do so with much forbearance and longsuffering. It will require an investment of time, resources and energy. Yet we do so without expecting anything in return. We are but following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who first supported us in our weakness, and now we go forth and do likewise.

THOUGHT: “Cups of cold water given in Jesus’ name, cups of cold water are never given in vain.”

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to have the patience and kindness to do all I can to help those in need.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

1 THESSALONIANS 5:15

ROMANS 12:17-21

*“...none render evil for evil
unto any man...”*

GOOD FOR EVIL

When we are on the receiving end of wicked deeds, the natural tendency is to fight back, to seek justice for the wrongs that have been committed against us. This thirst for vengeance is common, yet it is something the Bible continually exhorts us to put aside, for such a desire for revenge is sinful.

The exhortation here is very similar to Paul's instructions in Romans 12:19-21: *“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”* The message here is clear – we are not, in any circumstance, to try to seek vengeance on our own. This is God's domain. He knows how to judge.

Because of sin, there will always be evil in this world, and there will be times that we are at the receiving end of it. We cannot control what people do to us, but we can control our reaction to them. Will we lash out in a hot temper and do or say things that we will regret later? Will our mouths shoot forth an unpleasant word, or make a rash decision that is no better than the evil that is done against us? Will our thirst for revenge lead us to return evil for evil? What sort of testimony are we bearing for the Lord if this is how we react?

Instead, let us follow after that which is good, not just amongst ourselves, but towards all men. As Christians, we carry Christ's name. Our duty is to show forth a consistent testimony of Christlikeness in all our dealings with men. The next time someone offends you, take a moment to consider your actions, to be slow to speak, slow to wrath (James 1:19). Remember the exhortations of Christ to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile (Matt 5:38-42). Instead of reacting with anger, have compassion and love. Be willing to forgive, as Christ has forgiven us.

THOUGHT: Christ rendered good to me, I must do the same to others.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me a heart of compassion and forgiveness.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16

PSALM 100

“Rejoice evermore.”

REJOICE EVERMORE

Coming to the close of this epistle, Paul gave a series of short simple imperatives (commands) that we are all to do always without ceasing. These are fundamental to our Christian lives. They are key to having a vibrant spiritual life and central to the richness of our walk with the Lord.

The first command is that we rejoice in all circumstances, at all times. From the time that we become believers, we have the joy of the Lord in us. It is a lifelong source of joy that we can always have, for by faith we can always *“rejoice in hope of the glory of God”* (Rom 5:2). Through Christ, we have the assurance of our eternal salvation. We are confident in the goodness of God and know that He is always with us and caring for us. Therefore, Christians can always rejoice for we have Christ. As Isaiah 61:10 declares: *“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness...”*

Yet the reality is we are not always rejoicing in the Lord. Instead, we try to find joy from the fleeting carnal experiences of the world. We seek satisfaction in pursuing wealth, our careers, our relationships, in amassing material things, etc. Our moods are constantly swayed by our changing circumstances. When our desired expectations are not met, we get bogged down by anxiety, regret, anger and other emotions that rob us of true joy. They become noise in our soul that prevents us from a blessed communion with God. We lose sight of Christ and forget the wonderful joy that we should always be able to enjoy in the Lord.

We must be convicted to know that the greatest and purest joy can only be found in our relationship with God and actively obey this command to *“rejoice evermore.”* When we feel that the trials of life are getting us down, we must turn to Christ and remember that our hope is in Him alone. We rejoice because of who He is and what He has done for us. We must wean ourselves off the things of this world that corrupt our biblical idea of true joy, and seek Him alone for our joy and satisfaction.

THOUGHT: Only Christians can have true lasting, abiding joy.

PRAYER: Father, may I always experience true joy in Thee alone.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

1 THESSALONIANS 5:17

1 SAMUEL 12:19-24

“Pray without ceasing.”

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

This next command is one that is oft quoted, oft preached upon, but one that is sadly not so often obeyed. Yes, we may be regular with our prayers, praying every morning or night, or before every meal. We may have a list of things that we are interceding regularly for, but are we really praying without ceasing?

To pray without ceasing means that we are constantly and continually in communion with God. It does not mean that we do nothing but pray, but what it does mean is that we are not to do anything without prayer. Daily, we must keep the channels of communication open with the Lord. We are conscious and aware of His abiding presence with us, and know that at any moment throughout the day, we can always retreat into His arms and seek Him in prayer. Whether they are times of joy, sorrow, despair or excitement, we are calling upon God and sharing each moment with Him. Is that a description of your prayer life? Many believers seem content to live their lives according to their own understanding, seldom seeking after the Lord. They do not feel any desire to spend time in solace with Him. They may whisper a prayer in the morning, but after that, all communications are severed until the end of the day. There is no thought of God in their commute to work, nor is there any consideration of Him as they engage in their work. Often, they care more for the will of their bosses than for the will of God. Like proud teenagers who think they can make it on their own without their parents, they only realise how important their parents are when trouble comes.

Let us repent of our prayerlessness and seek to cultivate a more consistent prayer life. Let us start by praying and asking the Lord to teach us to pray, and to help us to pray more. The more we do not feel like praying, the more we need to pray! We must cultivate an awareness of the abiding presence of God in our lives, to know that He is always near and ever willing to hear our prayers. The more we know God and His Word, the more informed our prayers can be, and the more we would want to pray.

THOUGHT: Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?

PRAYER: Father, teach me to pray, and help me to pray more.

IN EVERY THING GIVE THANKS

The third command is *"in every thing give thanks."* It means that no matter what happens, in every circumstance, we must thank God. This would necessarily include both the good things, and what we perceive as "bad things" that happen in our lives. Even when things do not go the way we expect, such as financial difficulties, personal sicknesses, or the death of loved ones, yes, in all these things, we must give thanks as well. So, whether you lose your job or get promoted, your child does well in school or is diagnosed with a terminal illness, our confidence is that all these things happen according to God's will. As children of God, our lives are in His sovereign hands. We are ever guided by His providence and goodness. We have the assurance that all things will always work out for good to them who love God (Rom 8:28). Therefore, we can and must always give thanks, for this is God's will for us.

When we give thanks, we are acknowledging God's goodness toward us. We are giving Him the due praise that He is worthy of. On the other hand, when we fail to give thanks, we fail to give God the glory and show ourselves to be ungrateful. When life's trials come our way, we become bitter and discontented. Instead of thanking, we keep murmuring. There are times we might even blame God and repudiate our faith. Like the people of Israel wandering through the wilderness, we are never content, but at each difficulty we encounter, we murmur and complain, not realising that our good God is actually with us every step of the way.

Let us make a conscious effort to always count our blessings. In every prayer we make, always begin with thanksgiving. Remember that God is the all-wise and sovereign God. His providence is all encompassing, and He always plans what is the very best for us. He is in control of all things, and always *"meant it unto good"* (Gen 50:20). Take time each day to reflect on the many ways in which we have been blessed by God, and indeed "it will surprise you what the Lord has done." Even if things do not seem to be going your way and troubles abound, let us submit to the will of God and know that we can and must still give thanks.

THOUGHT: What can I thank God for today?

PRAYER: Father, help me always to be thankful for all things.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

1 THESSALONIANS 5:19

GALATIANS 5:16-26

“Quench not the Spirit.”

QUENCH NOT THE SPIRIT

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19, the Holy Spirit is pictured like a flame or light that illumines our path and leads us in the way of righteousness. He burns within us, igniting our desire for the Lord and directing us to live for Him. The command here is that we must stop quenching (to extinguish or douse) the Spirit that is working within us. It does not mean that we can completely rid ourselves of the Spirit, but that through what we do (or not do), we ignore and suppress the influence of the Spirit in our lives.

As believers, we all have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He has many functions in the believer's life, all of which are critical to our spiritual growth and maturity. The Holy Spirit is our helper, comforter and guide. He convicts us of our sin and guides us into all truth, helping us to understand spiritual things. Through His working in us, we bear forth the fruit of the Spirit. He grants us spiritual gifts through which we can serve the Lord. With the illumination of the Spirit, we can understand and apply the Word of God in our lives. Through all this, we grow in our sanctification.

When we quench the Spirit, we are hindering the Spirit in fulfilling all the above-mentioned roles. How does that happen? It is when we live in sin and walk in carnality. Galatians 5:17 warns us that *“the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”* Our sins are like the dirt and soil that we throw over a flame to douse it. Our carnal life chokes the Spirit within us and prevents Him from leading us down the paths of righteousness. When we fail to pray, neglect to read His Word, avoid fellowship with God's people, we ignore the means of grace that God has granted us to draw nigh to Him. This must stop.

Instead, let us sincerely desire to lead Spirit-filled lives. Rather than quenching, let us do all we can to ignite the flame of the Holy Spirit within us to burn greater and hotter. Let us pray earnestly that we will be filled with the Spirit and be faithful in all that we do.

THOUGHT: (Read Romans 8:6.)

PRAYER: Father, may Thou fill me with the Holy Spirit!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23

1 THESSALONIANS 5:20

MATTHEW 7:24-28

“Despise not prophesyings.”

DESPISE NOT PROPHESYINGS

Prophesyings are a means through which God makes known His will to man. When we encounter the term *“prophesying,”* we should not just think of the prophecies of the Bible that speak of future events, or the pseudo prophets of today who claim to have visions and dreams. The ministry of the prophet is really two-fold. One is *“foretelling,”* where he preaches on what God says concerning the future. Then there is the ministry of *“forthtelling,”* where he is but a faithful conveyer of God’s instructions or commands for the present. Today, we have the perfect Word of God in our hands and no longer require the ministry of *“foretelling.”* God has already told us all we need to know concerning the future. Therefore, prophesyings in the present refer to the faithful teaching of God’s Word (the product of the prophets of old).

We despise prophesyings when we dismiss the importance of God’s revelation to us. When we disregard the instructions from God, neglect to read and are not concerned to obey God’s Word, we show our contempt for God’s prophesyings. In like manner, we sometimes fail to respect the faithful preaching of the Word of God but arrogantly claim to have no need for it. We have this tendency to pick and choose to hear what is tantalising to our ears, that would humour us and make us feel good. But these may not be healthy for our souls.

Instead, we ought to come with a humble and receptive heart to listen to what God has to say to us. If the preacher is a faithful man of God, and he prepares his sermons faithfully according to the Bible text, he is indeed God’s messenger. His preaching ought to be received as it were the voice of God speaking to us. Instead of despising, we must love God’s Word. We must actively seek and respect prophesying. More than just on Sundays, we must also seek other opportunities where we can listen to God’s Word being preached, such as at Bible studies, prayer meetings or even Bible college lectures. Let us all be as newborn babes who desire the sincere milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby (1 Pet 2:2).

THOUGHT: When I despise prophesyings, I despise the God who gave them to me.

PRAYER: Father, teach me to love Thy truth and apply it in my life!

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

1 THESSALONIANS 5:21

ACTS 17:10-15

*“Prove all things;
hold fast that which is good.”*

PROVE ALL THINGS

We make choices every day. Where you are in life today is the culmination of all the choices that you have made. Our decisions do not just affect our secular life, but much more significantly, they affect our spiritual lives. That is why it is vital that we continually prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.

To prove means to verify or check if something is right. It involves scrutiny and thought, carefully examining and evaluating a matter before coming to a decision. When we make large purchases, it is common to read many reviews and trawl the internet to find the best deals. We have no qualms spending so much time doing thorough research to make sure we get the best products at the best price. However, when it comes to matters that affect our spiritual lives, are we as diligent and cautious? Do we care enough to want to test all things and make only the right decisions that are pleasing to God?

Remember that Satan is a master deceiver who goes about seeking his prey. If we are not careful to prove all things, we can easily fall prey to his spiritual deceptions. With his lies, he will tempt us with the *“cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches.”* He will lure us with the world and tempt us with the seductiveness of sin. Do not be scammed by Satan! We must constantly be on guard. Always check, ask, verify. Does this decision bring me closer to God, or further from Him? Will this improve the spiritual well-being of me and my family, or will it be detrimental to our spiritual health?

After our comprehensive, conscientious checking, we must follow-up with action. Knowing that something is not good, we must quickly reject it. Hold fast to that which is good, and never let it go. This is the spiritual discernment that believers must exercise for themselves. Only then can we have the right motivation to actively seek out that which is good and pleasing in God’s sight and commit to it with full conviction.

THOUGHT: What is more important: material wealth or spiritual health?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the wisdom and holy desire to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

1 THESSALONIANS 5:22

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-16

*“Abstain from all
appearance of evil.”*

NO APPEARANCE OF EVIL

Many people are very concerned about their physical appearance. They spend so much time on choosing the right clothes, doing up their hair, accessorising, etc. But are we as concerned about our spiritual testimony before the Lord? As believers, this is the appearance that we ought to be far more interested in. It is the testimony that we bear for the Lord.

The command here is that we must abstain from all appearance of evil. It means that we must distance ourselves not just from sin, but even the appearance of it. We must be very circumspect in all that we do, that we never give the wrong impression to anyone, that there be no possibility of any misunderstanding or confusion as to our holiness and moral purity. Yet we must be careful that we are not doing this as man pleasers. We do not want to be overly legalistic in policing what may or may not potentially be perceived as evil by others.

The purpose of this is twofold. First, it is for our conscience before God. We must be extremely careful that we do not in any way sin against God and offend Him. We want to stay as far from any temptation, or potential to sin, as possible. Instead, we seek after that which is just and good in the sight of God.

Second, it is to ensure that we maintain a blameless testimony before men, that we may be effective witnesses for God. We want to show forth a consistent testimony of Christ so that we can draw others to Him. We would loathe to be a stumbling block to others or be a hindrance to the Gospel in any way. We never want anyone to have any perception of moral impropriety in us, or to have our actions or motives misconstrued as being evil. Therefore, we ought to carefully examine our lives. If there are any questionable matters that could become a sin or a stumbling block to others around us, we abstain and stay very far away from them. Like Paul, our desire must be that we *“please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved”* (1 Cor 10:33).

THOUGHT: (Read 2 Corinthians 8:21.)

PRAYER: Father, help me to be a shining light for Thee.

SANCTIFICATION – A THOROUGH WORK

Looking at the list of commands and exhortations in the previous verses, we may sometimes feel overwhelmed, or even discouraged, as we consider the difficult task at hand. This whole quest for sanctification may seem onerous, for there are so many aspects of our lives that we know we fall short of God’s standards. How can we ever be godly enough, and attain to God’s high holy standards?

The assurance is that we are not alone in this endeavour. Just as we were saved by God’s grace, that same grace will guide us on our journey of sanctification. There is comfort in the benediction that Paul ended this epistle with, reminding us that God will sanctify us wholly.

The key word we want to consider here is the word “*wholly*.” It describes the thorough and complete work of sanctification that God is working in us. His purpose for us is that we will be completely pure and holy, preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord. He is concerned about every part of our lives, and that also includes our thoughts and the desires of our hearts. Therefore, He is the One who will preserve our whole soul and body blameless unto the coming of Christ. We can be assured that as God is the one doing this, He will certainly do it thoroughly and completely.

Part of that process entails trials that God will put us through. Gold or silver has to go through intense heat in order for the impurities to be burned off. In like manner, God sometimes allows difficulties and afflictions to come our way in order that we may grow in faith and have the impurities of sin and worldliness purged from us. Through these, we are further sanctified and drawn closer to God.

Will we pray to be sanctified? Do we desire for God to do the complete sanctification work in us? Are we looking forward to the Lord’s return?

THOUGHT: Is there any part of my life that I am afraid or reluctant to have God to sanctify?

PRAYER: Father, sanctify me wholly, that my whole soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-7

*“...preserved blameless unto
the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

SANCTIFICATION – A LIFELONG JOURNEY

How long will the process of sanctification take? When will I be more holy and more free from sin? Why is it that after being a believer for so long, I still find myself giving in to temptation and stumbling into sin? It can be a frustrating thing – yearning for sanctification yet not maturing as fast as we would like to. On our part, we must continue to fulfil our human responsibility in seeking after God and His Word. But we must also have patience and faith in the Lord, trusting that He will in His perfect time and will, keep us *“blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Know that sanctification is a lifelong journey. It begins at the point of our salvation and will continue all through our life until the day we die or when the Lord returns. There should never be a point in our life where we think that we are holy enough for God and are sufficiently sanctified. Rather, the opposite is true. When we grow in our spiritual maturity, we become more and more sensitive to sin. As we study God’s Word more, we learn of the perfection of God’s holiness and the terribleness of sin. We become more aware of our own unworthiness and realise how much we need Christ in this life. This was the struggle of the Apostle Paul when he cried in Romans 7:19, *“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.”* It is not to say that he was terribly sinful, but it was precisely because of his thorough knowledge of the law of God that he was conscious of every little sin.

The assurance we have is that God is the one working in us. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are led to grow in our sanctification. Each day, He enables us to grow a little more in our spiritual maturity, to commit a little less sin, and be a little more holy. We must trust the process that God has planned for us, for we are confident that *“He which hath begun a good work (of salvation) in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil 1:6). As we look forward to that day, let us abide in Christ and trust in His work in our lives.

THOUGHT: How have I grown in the Lord since the day I was saved?

PRAYER: Father, help me to wait upon Thee and trust always in Thy guidance in my life.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 28

1 THESSALONIANS 5:24

ROMANS 8:28-30

*"Faithful is he that calleth you,
who also will do it."*

GOD IS FAITHFUL

The Lord is a faithful God. This is the assurance we are given throughout the Bible. *"Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations"* (Deut 7:9). In like manner, 1 Thessalonians 5:24 gives us the divine guarantee that the same faithful God who called us unto Himself and saved us, is the same God who will also do the work of sanctification in our lives such that we will be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation is wholly the work of our faithful God. From calling us unto salvation till one day calling us home into glory, God is the one ensuring that we will always remain in the palm of His hands. Romans 8:29-30 takes a few steps further back in time to describe how we are first known by God even before the foundation of the world, and then He predestines us unto salvation. Then at a point in time, He calls us unto Himself and receives us as His sons and daughters. By His grace, we believe and repent of our sins, and so we are justified. Finally, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns one day, we who are called will most certainly be caught up to meet Him in the air and granted our glorified bodies to be with God in heaven for eternity. These are all the doings of our faithful God. From start to finish, salvation is of the Lord.

We can therefore have full assurance that God will certainly fulfil all the exceeding great and precious promises that He has given to us (2 Pet 1:4). As He guides us through this life, we know we are not alone as He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Heb 13:5). He is the faithful God who will answer our prayers and protect us from all evil (2 Thess 3:3). We know that His favour will be upon us, for He has promised to bless us and keep us, be gracious to us and grant us His peace (Num 6:24-26). Indeed, our God is a great God, and great is His faithfulness! Will you trust in this faithful God? Will you be faithful to Him?

THOUGHT: How can I be unfaithful to my faithful God?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy faithfulness unto me. Help me then always to be faithful to Thee.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 29

1 THESSALONIANS 5:25-26

HEBREWS 10:24-25

“Brethren, pray for us.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF FELLOWSHIP

What is a *“holy kiss”*? In the culture of the Near East during New Testament times, it was a common greeting among family and friends to kiss one another. It did not have any romantic or sensual connotations, but was a simple platonic act used as a friendly greeting and nothing more. Our modern-day equivalent could be a good firm handshake. Note that Paul added the word *“holy,”* signifying that it was not just social interactions that he was exhorting them to have, but pure undefiled relationships, where they gathered because of their bond in Christ. Paul also requested for the brethren to pray for him. In the verses before that, he shared the prayers he was making for them. He understood the value of intercessory prayer, of having brethren to pray for one another. This is something that all believers must actively do for one another.

Through both these simple instructions, we see a call to fellowship. Fellowship is important in every believer’s life. In order to pray for one another and have opportunities to greet one another, we must first be in one another’s lives. If we seclude ourselves from any fellowship, we would not know much about what is going on in others’ lives and would not know what to pray for. Likewise, if we do not spend time with one another, then there would be no cause for greetings or *“holy kisses.”*

If we truly care for our fellow brethren, we would want to spend time to edify and encourage one another. It is sad to see so many worshippers rushing off right after worship each Lord’s Day, not caring to stay back for fellowship. They are seldom involved in any Bible study or fellowship group. For a church to be more vibrant and effective, we all must do our part in godly fellowship, to get to know one another and say a kind word of encouragement. Simple things like these go a long way towards fostering closer ties of fellowship. As we are exhorted in Hebrews 10:24-25, let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but rather, constantly think of one another and have opportunities to provoke one another unto love and good works.

THOUGHT: How well do I know my fellow believers in church?

PRAYER: Father, help me to understand the importance of fellowship and to be involved in the lives of my fellow saints.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30

1 THESSALONIANS 5:27

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13

*“...that this epistle be read
unto all the holy brethren.”*

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING GOD’S WORD

Imagine being part of the congregation at Thessalonica when they first received this epistle from Paul. In obedience to Paul’s instruction, the pastor called for a special meeting to come together to hear this letter being read. There would be a buzz of excitement that rippled through the community as everyone looked forward to hearing from the dear man of God whom they were *“desiring greatly to see”* (1 Thess 3:6).

As the time for the reading drew near, the church would be packed to the brim. Everyone came extra early and waited with nervous anticipation. There would be a reverential silence, more quiet than usual, that fell upon the crowd as the pastor stood before them and started. What was so special about this service? They knew that the word that they would be hearing was not just *“the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God”* (1 Thess 2:13). Yes, they were the writings of the Apostle Paul, but he wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, penning the very words of God!

Yes, it would have been thrilling to hear the words of this epistle (or any other Bible book) read in public for the first time. But what we have in our hands today is the complete Word of God, so easily accessible and readily available. Compared to how it was in those days, we have abundant opportunities to read and study the Word of God. Back then, Scripture had to be copied by hand. The number of copies were limited, and cumbersome to carry around. Today, we have it not just on our shelves, but also in our phones and tablets. We have so many tools to aid us in understanding the Word of God. Do we avail ourselves to them? Do we care to pick up the Bible to read, to understand, and then to apply to our lives?

We have spent three months studying this precious epistle, and I trust you have gleaned many precious truths from it. Just as it was for the Thessalonians, it is God’s Word to us. You have received it, understood it. Has it been effectually working in you? (1 Thess 2:13).

THOUGHT: When I read the Bible, God is speaking to me!

PRAYER: Father, may I always love and cherish Thy Word!

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31

1 THESSALONIANS 5:28

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

*“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
be with you. Amen.”*

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD’S GRACE

As we come to the final verse in the book of 1 Thessalonians, it is fitting that we end with a meditation on the grace of God. The closing line of the epistle reads: *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”* Indeed, how important it is for every believer to have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with us. It is the favour of God freely given to us, a kindness that we do not deserve. Without the grace of God, we would have no salvation, no sanctification. It is only through the abundant grace of God that we have anything in this life at all. By His grace, He has saved us and forgiven us of all our sins. By His grace, He blesses us abundantly in this life and grants us the promise of eternity in heaven.

Throughout this life, we must have the conviction that the grace of God guides us. It is the blessed assurance that we have, to know that God will always deal with us according to His grace and His goodness. No matter what it is that happens to us, we know that we are under His care and protection. His gracious hand and loving favour guide us through all that we encounter in this life.

When we face trials and times of difficulty, God’s grace is what we need. His words assure us as they did the Apostle Paul when he suffered from the thorn in his flesh: *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong”* (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Let us therefore always be thankful for His grace and be assured to know that His abundant grace is always with us. We can look forward to the hope of the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ, for by His grace we will be ushered home to eternity.

THOUGHT: Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus!

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the wonderful promise of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that is ever with us.

Notes

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