

Session 5

GROUPS: LIFE TOGETHER

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 3:1-9

Memory Verse

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word.

– 2 THESSALONIANS 2:16-17, CSB




Groups: Life Together

THEOLOGICAL THEME: We were created for community and God intends for us to be connected with others who are likeminded and will encourage and support us as we follow Him.

According to an article by the Mayo Clinic, real benefits come from having strong friend groups. Friends can celebrate with you in good times and mourn with you in tough times. Strong social connections play a vital role in your overall wellbeing and are proven to help reduce the risk of significant health problems. This includes depression, high blood pressure, stress, and feelings of isolation. You are even likely to live longer with friends.¹

Today, we will consider the importance of godly relationships within the church. The intimacy of these relationships surpasses typical worldly friendships. Those who are in the church are more than friends—they've been united as a family through the work of Jesus.

 Why do you think strong adult connections lead to health benefits?

 What positives have you experienced because of a friend or friend group?

Session Summary

Paul had a strong bond with the believers in Thessalonica. He wrote to share how he was grateful for them and to let them know he regularly prayed for them. It is important to pray for those God has brought into our lives and to ask for their prayers too. Paul named specific things he needed prayer for and expected that his friends in Thessalonica would honor his requests.

Being in community with other Bible believing people who will encourage and pray for you has no substitute. Paul recognized the importance of this kind of community. He wrapped up this portion of his letter by exhorting his readers to follow his example. We should be like Paul in the way we seek to connect with others, and we should strive to live in such a way that we can also tell others to follow us as we point them to the gospel.


1. Strong Bonds (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 3:1-2)

The relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians was deep and demonstrates some important characteristics of being connected with others. Paul had invested in and taught these people what it meant to follow Jesus. Their lives had been impacted by Paul's ministry, and they supported and encouraged Paul. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, there are likely people who have invested in you in a similar fashion. If you haven't made that decision yet, there are those who are willing to help show you how much Jesus loves you and wants to give you an abundant life.

? Who is like Paul in your life? Who has pointed you to Jesus and shown you what it means follow Him, whether you are following Jesus or not?


One of the most powerful things a church community does is pray for one another. By recalling what God had already done in their lives, Paul recounted how much the Lord loved the Thessalonians along with all he had done for them. Thinking about God's faithfulness in the past strengthens our trust in Him for the future. God has been faithful and will always be faithful. Because that is who He is, He cannot go against His own nature.

Paul listed some specific ways he was praying for his friends in Thessalonica. He prayed that God would comfort their hearts and establish their works. Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would be encouraged in their work of ministry and receive strength to stand up under the pressures they faced for following Jesus. One role of godly community is to recognize the difficulties you are dealing with and look for ways to strengthen and encourage you. Nothing is more impactful in this regard than prayer.

 **How have you experienced the blessing of having others pray for you?**

Good relationships are always two-sided. Paul knew it was important for him to pray for the Thessalonians and for them to pray for him. Paul recognized the value of prayer, and he consistently asked fellow Christians to lift his needs up to the Lord. He knew the success of his ministry was greatly enhanced by the prayers of other people. Just as he had specific requests of God for the Thessalonians, Paul asked them to pray intentionally about his life and ministry.

Paul wanted the Word of God to be effective in the lives of those who heard it. He had seen the result of people hearing and believing God's Word. He wanted to see more of that life change in more people. He asked for prayer that the Word would advance with no hindrances and that God would keep evil people from stopping the work either by overpowering them or changing their minds. Consider what it would be like for the Word to be unleashed and to speed around unhindered by the work of evil forces today.

 **Application: How would your life be different if the Word of God was unhindered in you?**

2. Strong Confidence (2 Thessalonians 3:3-6)

Paul spoke and wrote with great confidence based entirely on the Lord and who He is. Instead of being confident in his own work, effort, or success, Paul knew the only basis for a confidence that cannot be shaken is God. People mistakenly look to many other things for confidence, but they can and will likely fail at some point. Think about how circumstances, the economy, other people, your health, and other worldly things can fail you and are not worthy of your confidence.

? Why is misplacing your confidence dangerous? When was a time you did this? What did God teach you from this experience?

He encouraged his friends to see that even though not all men are faithful, they could completely count on God to stay true to Himself and His Word. People will fail and fall short. Even those who have a relationship with Jesus will mess up and not always represent Him accurately, but He can never go against His own nature. We should never attribute to God the flaws of His people. He is completely holy and without flaw.

? All people fail and hurt others at times, including those who follow Jesus. What do we misunderstand about following Jesus if we think the failures of God's people means God is not trustworthy or good?

Paul also wrote on the confidence he had in the Thessalonians' faithfulness to the Lord. This goes back to God establishing His work in His people. God doesn't just pour out maturity and stability on us; we develop these things through continual obedience to Him. It happens as we grow to know Him and seek Him on a regular basis. Connecting with others who are likeminded encourages us to stay the course and keep moving toward Jesus even when it's difficult.

You can have a life of confidence in the Lord like Paul and the Thessalonians. You don't need to live on a shaky foundation when you can place your faith in Jesus and trust in Him for salvation. Paul reminded his friends in Thessalonica that they must choose to respond in obedience to the Word of God and base their faith on who God is and not how other people act. He expressed his confidence that they would continue growing in their faith and deepening their influence.

Towards this end, Paul boldly commanded them to be careful about who they were spending time with. Paul encouraged them to keep from being entangled with those who reject the commands of God. The people you choose to surround yourself with matter a great deal. Are you looking for those who uphold and obey the Word, or do you spend your time with people who reject the Lord and His Word? Your community will either build your confidence in the Lord or undermine it.

? Application: How can you seek to build further relationships with those who are seeking God daily?

3. Strong Examples (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9)

Not many of us are quick to tell others to follow our example of following Jesus. We may be too worried that our choices and imperfections will lead people astray instead of right to Jesus. The truth is we should strive to live our lives in such a way that we can confidently lead others to see what righteous living looks like.

? What is the biggest reason you might hesitate to tell others to follow your example in various areas of life? If you are following Jesus, what is intimidating about living as an example for others in this area?

Paul knew he had been a strong example to those in Thessalonica. Paul specifically pointed out the way he worked hard to support his needs instead of relying on the support of others. Although it would be perfectly acceptable for the churches to support Paul's ministry, and they actually did, his goal was to remove any chance of a false accusation that he preached the Word of God for personal gain.

Consider how serious Paul was about not giving any reason for a false accusation. In the same way, we should be willing to avoid giving others the opportunity to raise any false accusations against us. When we follow Paul's example, we live so that our influence for the gospel will not be compromised in any way.

? If you're a Christian, what are some things you can do to follow the strong example of Paul and make sure your life represents Christ well? If you aren't yet a follower of Jesus, who in your life represents Jesus well?


Consider how the effort Paul made spoke volumes to those who watched. Instead of looking to do the least possible, when a Christian goes the extra mile, works hard, puts in effort, makes sacrifices, and is willing to be inconvenienced, his or her example draws people toward Jesus and removes possible obstacles to coming to believe in Jesus.


? Application: How does the behavior of Christians affect the advance of the gospel? How does your life need to change so that you are following Paul's example of following Jesus faithfully?

Conclusion

Paul prayed over the people he was in community with, even as they were separated physically. He also requested their prayers for his ministry, demonstrating one of the greatest gifts of living in godly community. Burdens shared are burdens lightened and celebrations shared are celebrations that grow even bigger. That is why the Lord tells us to continually gather and not isolate ourselves (Hebrews 10:24-25). We were made for community in the family of God.

Paul listed his prayers for his friends and followed with his own requests. One of the greatest impacts of godly community is the practice of prayer together and for one another. It is through prayer that we are strengthened to keep going when times get tough. The people in our groups are the ones we can count in to pray for us even as we pray for them also. Paul gave an example worth following both in his involvement in Christian community and in his dedication to following Jesus. We should seek to live together in a way that models the same.

 Where are you missing community in your life right now? How might this group be a support for you in that area?

 How can you support others in our group right now? How can you follow the example of Paul of making known your own burdens while also seeking to carry those of others?

 If we live together in the way Paul described, how might this give us opportunity to share about Jesus with others?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

Going in Ministry

Main Passages

- Ephesians 4:1-16

Session Outline

1. Walk Worthy (Ephesians 4:1-3)
2. Be Unified (Ephesians 4:4-10)
3. Lead & Equip (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Memorize

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, CSB

References

¹Mayo Clinic Staff, "Friendships: Enrich Your Life and Improve Your Health," Mayo Clinic, January 12, 2022, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/friendships/art-20044860>.