

SCC Small Group
“1 Thessalonians”
Part 1 – Covering chapters 1 - 3

Session 1: Being sure of our Beliefs Acts 17:1-15 & 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

Session 2: Being sure of our Purpose 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

Session 3: Being sure of our Motives 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Session 4: Being sure of our Value 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:8

Session 5: Being sure of our Prayers 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

By Rev. Rick Dietzman, Minister of Adult Discipleship

November/December 2009

Introduction to Paul's letters to the Thessalonians:

“You won't learn unless you ask questions.” Countless teachers and parents have explained this truth to children through the years. Those who desire to train others and impart knowledge don't mind responding to queries. Questions help them know what students are thinking and learning. Those who don't verbalize their doubts, voice their concerns or seek to clarify what they have heard often harbor misunderstanding, go the wrong way or live in ignorance. Paul wrote both 1 and 2 Thessalonians to answer believer's questions and to commend them on their faith and commitment to Christ.

The Thessalonians had questions. They wanted to be sure. As you walk through the topics of these small group studies, you'll see the kinds of questions they were asking and the assurances the Apostle Paul gives. These are the same kinds of questions we are asking today. We'll tackle fourteen areas where people are looking for assurance as we encounter 1 and 2 Thessalonians over the coming months.

The letters to the Thessalonians were written from Corinth around AD 51. They are among Paul's earliest letters (some think they were his first ones to a local church). As you'll see in Session 1, the story starts in Acts 17 where Paul comes to this bustling seaport (with a population of about 200,000 people) after leaving Philippi and stays a little over three weeks there. In that short amount of time a church is formed, but Paul and his companions are soon forced to leave. Since Paul cannot physically return and help this young congregation personally, he sends Timothy to check in on them, and pen's these two letters to help them along in their faith.

Session 1: Being sure of our Beliefs Acts 17:1-15 & 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

By Rev. Rick Dietzman, Minister of Adult Discipleship November 2009

Ice breaker: Have you ever had to defend your beliefs in front of people who disagreed with you? What did you say at the time?

Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman Province of Macedonia. It was one of the wealthiest and most flourishing commerce centers in the Roman empire, located along a major trading route. Before the small group time, read the following story from Acts about what happened when Paul and his companions entered the city for the first time soon after leaving Philippi. Note how they respond to the opposition they face.

Acts 17:1-10 (New Living Translation)

Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah." Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women.

But some of the Jews were jealous, so they gathered some troublemakers from the marketplace to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd. Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. "Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world," they shouted, "and now they are here disturbing our city, too. And Jason has welcomed them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus."

The people of the city, as well as the city council, were thrown into turmoil by these reports. So the officials forced Jason and the other believers to post bond, and then they released them. That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

1. Since his conversion, this was the sixth time Paul had been forced by persecution to leave an area. How do you think this affected him? How would you view your mission in life if this happened to you?
2. Standing up for a minority position is never comfortable, especially against an angry mob. Why was there so much anger and jealousy directed at Paul?
3. To what extent were the accusations made against the Christians a misunderstanding? What kind of misunderstandings do you encounter today?

When Paul and his co-workers left Thessalonica they next stayed in Berea which had a markedly different spiritual receptivity.

Read Acts 17:11-12 (New International Version)

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

4. Comparing these two passages, what was the main difference between the Jews in each city?

5. Why was “examining the Scriptures everyday to see if what Paul said was true” so noteworthy? How has this kind of examination helped you in discerning what to receive from pastors and preachers?

6. In this example, the authority of God’s word was the standard for assessing Paul and his teachings about Jesus? Nowadays the attacks are not directed just at the uniqueness of Jesus, but at the reliability or authority of the Bible as well. How have you dealt with that?

As a final insult to injury, the Jews in Thessalonica were not content to just run Paul out of their city, but they actually came after him in the next place he was having a receptive audience.

Read Acts 17:13-15 (New International Version)

When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

A little later, Paul would send Timothy back to Thessalonica to check in on the church. He returned with good news: the Christians were standing firm in their faith and were unified. (See 1 Thessalonians 3:5-8 for the description)

7. After seeing the context of all his struggles, if you had been Paul writing a letter to the Thessalonians, what would you have wanted to say to them?

The opening of I Thessalonians reveals that Paul had a deep concern for the church and was impressed with their perseverance.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 (New International Version)

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We've been talking about being sure of our beliefs, and here Paul was expressing deep relief. He had been waiting months to hear back about the state of this fledgling church. Given the level of opposition we saw in the passages of Acts, this little fellowship could have easily gone under. When he realized that they were standing firm in their faith, he was overjoyed and wanted to help in any way he could.

8. Have you ever prayed for a person (or group of people) you know had started off in their faith in Jesus, but you weren't sure how they had progressed? Did you have the chance to hear about it later? How did it affect you?

9. In verse 3, Paul reminded the believers of the things that keep them secure in their beliefs:

Their faith – produces their good works

Their love – prompts their labor

Their hope – inspires their endurance

How have these attributes given you assurance in your own life?

Group Prayer Time: In this session we've talked about being sure in our beliefs. We all encounter opposition at times or misunderstanding. Sometimes we need to search the Bible more intently to see what is true. Spend some time praying together and note how God has been at work in your lives to give you confidence and assurance. Pray also for any needs you are facing in the group.

Digging Deeper: for those who wish to do more personal reflection on this topic

Tracing the Triad of Faith, Hope and Love through the New Testament.

Take note of how faith hope and love are used in the following passages: What is said about these three attributes?

Romans 5:1-5

1 Corinthians 13:13

Galatians 5:5-6

Colossians 1:3-5

1 Thessalonians 1:3

1 Thessalonians 5:8

Hebrews 6:10-12

Hebrews 10:22-24

1 Peter 1:3-9

1 Peter 1:21-22

Q: Why do you think this triad occurs so often in Scripture?

Make a list of how each of these three characteristics are outwardly manifested in each of the passages above.

Session 2: Being sure of our Purpose 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

By Rev. Rick Dietzman, Minister of Adult Discipleship November 2009

Ice Breaker: Paul talked about the Thessalonians being a model for others to follow. Who is a model or example that you look up to and try to copy in some aspect of your life?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 (New Living Translation)

We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true.

1. How did Paul know that they were chosen?

2. What role did the Holy Spirit play in the Thessalonians' faith?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 (New Living Translation)

And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord.

As we noted in our last session, the church in Thessalonica faced incredible pressure. The Jewish converts in the church were hated and persecuted by unbelieving Jews of the synagogue who were extremely antagonistic to the gospel of Jesus. The Gentile (Non-Jewish) converts suffered in that they had to swim against the current of idolatry that was very prevalent in their society.

3. What enabled the believers to overcome the pressures they were under?

4. How has the Holy Spirit brought you joy in the midst of suffering or opposition?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8 (New Living Translation)

As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia. And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it,

We've already seen that faith, hope, love, and joy in the midst of suffering caused these believers to stand out and become an inspiration for others.

5. Based on what we've read so far, do you think the Thessalonian church understood its purpose for existence? What do you think that was?
6. Do any modern day examples of inspirational churches come to your mind? What attributes do they have?
7. How can our own church be a model in our community? What kind of attitudes and actions could cause the "word of the Lord to ring out" everywhere?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 (New Living Translation)

for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.

8. What would be some parallels for us today of turning away from the “powers” (or idols) of this world to serve the one true God?

9. In this section Paul described the conversion of the Thessalonians. What are the characteristics of that conversion?

As you have come to faith, how has your own life touched on these same characteristics?

Group Prayer Time: In this session we’ve taken a closer look at one of the purposes of our calling as Christians: that the message of Jesus would ring out everywhere. Pray for the increase of our faith, hope and love in the midst of all situations so that others can come to know Jesus. Pray also for any other needs in the group that people mention.

Digging Deeper: for those who wish to do more personal reflection on this topic

The importance of models and examples in the Bible

Read the following passages

John 13:13-16

1 Corinthians 11:1-2

Philippians 3:17

1 Thessalonians 2:14

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

1 Timothy 1:16

1 Timothy 4:12

Titus 2:7-8

James 5:10

1 Peter 2:21

Q: How do these passages show the importance of having examples for the Christian life?

Q: How have examples from either the present day or from the Bible helped you to understand and live out your own faith?

Session 3: Being sure of our Motives 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

By Rev. Rick Dietzman, Minister of Adult Discipleship

December 2009

Ice Breaker:

Have you ever been in a situation where you questioned someone's motives or had others question yours? Describe.

The ancient world had its fair share of wandering salesmen, travelling teachers and people who tried to make a living by offering their hearers fresh wisdom or insight. When Paul and his companions arrived in a city and began to tell their strange story, many must have thought that was the sort of people they were. They cynics were waiting for the moment when the speakers produced the moneybag and requested contributions, or invited people to pay to hear more in private. To their surprise, this never happened with Paul. In this section we will be looking at today, Paul describes what his true motives were.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3 (New Living Translation)

You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure. You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition. So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery.

1. Why would the fact that Paul had faced opposition prove that his motives were pure?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6 (New Living Translation)

For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else.

2. From this passage, what set Paul and his co-workers apart from other travelling teachers?
3. What does this teach you about your own motivations for sharing the good news with others? What kind of attitudes should we have?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 (New Living Translation)

As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were gentle among you. We were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too. Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you. You yourselves are our witnesses—and so is God—that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers. And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory.

4. What “rights” did Paul give up? Do you think pastors and missionaries should give up those same rights today, or were these special circumstances for a skeptical audience who needed to see something different? See 1 Corinthians 9:11-16 below for Paul's description of these “rights”.

1 Corinthians 9:11-16 (New Living Translation)

Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren't we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink? If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ. Don't you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. Yet I have never used any of these rights. And I am not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge. Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!

5. In what ways were the believers in Thessalonica built up by these traveling apostles?

6. What do you think Paul meant when he said “we shared God’s good news and also our own lives”?

7. Besides your actual children, for whom do you feel a special spiritual affection and concern (like a mother or father)? What caused you to start investing in them? Has anyone ever been a “spiritual parent” to you?

What does this passage tell us about how we might serve and minister to our own children or other close relatives we care about?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 (New Living Translation)

Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn't think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe. And then, dear brothers and sisters, you suffered persecution from your own countrymen. In this way, you imitated the believers in God's churches in Judea who, because of their belief in Christ Jesus, suffered from their own people, the Jews. For some of the Jews killed the prophets, and some even killed the Lord Jesus. Now they have persecuted us, too. They fail to please God and work against all humanity as they try to keep us from preaching the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles. By doing this, they continue to pile up their sins. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last.

8. How did receiving Paul's message as the word of God help these believers through the inevitable persecution they faced?

9. How does knowing that God will make things right in the end help you purify your own motives when you feel under attack for your faith?

Group Prayer Time: In this session we've talked about being sure about our motives. Sometimes we have to give up certain rights and privileges for the sake of others so that they can come closer to God. Who has God called you to sacrifice for or help grow in their faith? Pray also for any needs you are facing in the group.

Digging Deeper: for those who wish to do more personal reflection on this topic

Spiritual parenting – how to be and or find a mentor

Mentoring is a relational experience through which one person empowers another by sharing God given resources.

We all need mentors, people to help us grow stronger in our faith and other life habits. What happens in mentoring is simple: Someone who knows something transfers that something at a sensitive time so that it impacts development. There are many types of mentors that we need at various points of our lives. No one person is the perfect mentor, but if we look around we can find what we need at the proper time, and also make ourselves available to others to help them along the way. Here are some ways to be intentional in that process.

Types of Mentors – how to find one and be one.

Discipler: Enables person in basics of following Christ. Lays a foundation. A good place to start is Alpha class (9 weeks on the basics of Christianity) starting Thursday April 8th at SCC. Come yourself or invite a friend and come with them for the course, then journey through it with them. For those who can disciple, initiative is key,

be on the lookout for someone to challenge. Recommended reading: *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden

Teacher: Provides knowledge, motivation to learn, ideas, and vision.

Coach: Enhances person's skills and gives motivation to use them.

How to approach the need for a teacher or coach:

1. Figure out what you need? discipline skills, devotional habits, skills for working in teams, teaching skills, evangelism, Bible knowledge, etc...
2. Don't look for the one person who can do it all. Find someone who can meet the particular need and approach them for help or resources. Try to get in a situation where you see the skill modeled and then can apply it yourself, such as co-leading a Bible study, help with a ministry team.
3. If all else fails, do self-education. Find a book on the topic!

Counselor: Gives timely advice and correct perspectives on viewing self and others. Helps a person to overcome emotional and spiritual blocks.

Start with your network of relationships and approach someone who you respect, who has a degree of spiritual authority in people's lives. That could be a pastor, elder, ministry leader, or someone else God has directed to your path.

Recommended reading: *Changes that Heal* by Dr. Henry Cloud

Sponsor: Guides and helps to open up new opportunities.

These are necessary at different times in life. A few things you can do:

1. Develop yourself in areas of potential.
2. Demonstrate loyalty
3. Trust God to give you the upper leadership who will back you. If you are in the position to be a sponsor, be on the lookout for people with potential and back their ideas, provide resources, form new roles for them to demonstrate their gifts, give affirmation.

Tips for Mentoring Relationships

1. Establish the relationship. Sometimes mentoring relationships just happen or develop in a natural way. But usually they require cultivation. Invest yourself in the person and the process and cover everything with prayer.
2. Jointly agree on the purpose of the mentoring relationship. Find out the expectations. Clarify the purpose of why you are meeting. Both should share the same expectations going into the mentoring relationship. Is it for coaching in an area, discipling habits, counseling? etc.

3. Determine the regularity of interaction. A known regular pattern for meetings or feedback and input (even if a-periodic) is better than no pattern. Availability for impromptu times opens the door for developing the relationship. Once a month, every two weeks. For how long?
4. Determine what you will do. Agree together how you will establish and check up on mentoring assignments. The heart of empowerment lies not only in what the mentor shares with the mentoree but the assignments the mentor gives the mentoree.
5. Clarify the level of confidentiality. Talk about it with them up front, whether certain things will not be passed along to others. Set up ground rules for what is appropriate to talk about.
6. Set the life cycle of the relationship. Set reasonable time limits for the type of mentoring you will be involved in. There is a need for beginning, review of accomplishments, and closure. Avoid open ended mentorships, break things into manageable chunks that can be extended if it looks like the mentoring relationship will go further. At the end of each part have closure, and evaluate.
7. Help them find a potential mentoree. The best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else. If a new mentoree can be found then you have multiplied yourself and given the person a launching pad to new growth areas.
8. Closure. Begin with the end in mind. Bring satisfactory closure to a mentoring experience. Motivate the person by pointing out the empowerment that has happened. Be open to the possibility of renewing the mentoring relationship, continue to build the friendship even if there is no anticipated official mentoring in the future.

Spiritual Parenting or mentoring doesn't just happen. These tips will help you in going deep with a few people who God brings into your life.

Q: Who comes to mind as a person you might help with their spiritual growth?

Q: Which of the mentoring types are you most naturally suited for right now if you were in a position to help out another person?

Q: What type of mentor do you need most right now?

Session 4: Being sure of our Value 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:8

By Rev. Rick Dietzman, Minister of Adult Discipleship December 2009

Ice Breaker: Think of a time when you have been separated from a Christian friend or family member and not heard a word of how that person was doing. How did you feel?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 (New Living Translation)

Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again. We wanted very much to come to you, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us. After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy.

When Paul wrote that he was separated from the believers he used the term that means “orphaned”, the emphasis being a forced and painful separation. In Acts 17:5-10 we find that Paul and his co-workers were driven away from the city by a riot.

1. How do you think Satan prevented Paul from returning to Thessalonica?

Have you ever had a circumstance where you wanted to connect with a loved one but felt that something evil was getting in the way?

2. How do you interpret Paul’s statement that the Thessalonians would be his hope, joy and crown when Jesus returns? What does this tell you about “rewards” in heaven.

8. How have you seen suffering or temptation get people off track and make God's work seem useless. Has that been something rare in your experience or have you encountered it a lot?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8 (New Living Translation)

But now Timothy has just returned, bringing us good news about your faith and love. He reports that you always remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us as much as we want to see you. So we have been greatly encouraged in the midst of our troubles and suffering, dear brothers and sisters, because you have remained strong in your faith. It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord.

9. In this case, Timothy brought back good news about the church. Tell about a time you got "new life" from an encouraging report about someone you have been deeply concerned about.

Group Prayer Time: In this session we've talked about being sure of our value. We learned from Paul that the people he invested in were his most treasured possession. Who in your life is your joy and crown? Thank God for them. Pray also for any needs you are facing in the group.

Digging Deeper: for those who wish to do more personal reflection on this topic

Crowns as rewards in heaven. The Bible has many references to crowns or prizes. Read the following verses:

1 Corinthians 9:25

2 Timothy 4:8

James 1:12

1 Peter 5:4

Revelation 2:10

Revelation 4:10

Summarize what a Christian must do to earn such crowns

Describe what you think these “crowns” or “prizes” are.

Q: How does the earning of crowns relate to salvation by grace (not good works)? see Ephesians 2:8-10

Session 5: Being sure of our Prayers 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

By Rev. Rick Dietzman, Minister of Adult Discipleship December 2009

Ice Breaker: Think of someone you regularly pray for. What is the content or substance of your prayers?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10 (New Living Translation)

How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy as we enter God's presence. Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith.

This is not the first time Paul mentioned prayer in this letter.

Remember 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 (New Living Translation)

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Paul said he prayed night and day for the believers. Why is persistence in prayer so important?

The Bible has much to say about persistent prayer.

In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus *"told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."* (verse 1). A widow kept asking a judge to grant her justice and eventually he gave in. Jesus concluded by comparing this human judge to God. *"Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."* (verses 7-8).

2. What is a "justice issue" that you have prayed for fervently?

3. When you pray are you more likely to give up early or keep at it for a long time?

4. How do you know when to conclude that the answer is “no” or “wait”?

James 4:2-3 talks about situations when we don't get what we ask for:

You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

5. Name some right motives for prayer, and some wrong ones.

6. What is it about Paul's requests that show they came from right motives?

In the passage above Paul said he wanted to “fill in the gaps” (or “supply what is lacking”) in the believers' faith. The word in Greek for “supply” was commonly used the following ways:

- Setting a broken bone
- Equipping an army
- Outfitting a fleet of ships for battle
- Mending torn nets

7. What do you think Paul meant specifically for the Thessalonian church? Why would he need to go there personally to carry it out?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 (New Living Translation)

May God our Father and our Lord Jesus bring us to you very soon. And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. May he, as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all his holy people. Amen.

8. What are the three things Paul asked for in these verses, and why were they relevant in light of what the Thessalonians were dealing with?

How do these requests compare to what you normally ask for (things you want, decisions, sickness etc.)? Have you recently prayed for anyone in terms of Paul's requests?

9. So far Paul has closed every chapter in 1 Thessalonians with a reference to Christ's return (1:10, 2:19, and 3:13) What do you think his purpose was in doing this?

Group Prayer Time: In this session we've talked about being sure of our prayers. God wants us to have confidence that he is listening, and also wants us to direct our prayers to the right concerns. For this prayer time model your prayers after 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. Pray also for any needs you are facing in the group.

Digging Deeper: for those who wish to do more personal reflection on this topic

Changing the world through prayer – sometimes the teaching of those who have deeply experienced the power of prayer can be most helpful to us. Here's some wisdom from almost 200 years ago that still applies today.

Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) was a congregational revivalist, theologian, abolitionist, and college president. Most known for his revivals, Finney was used of God to bring more than half a million people into the kingdom. The following was taken from Finney's Lectures on Revival.

Principles for effective prayer:

1. One must pray for a definite object. He need not expect to offer such prayer, if he prays at random, without any distinct or definite object. He must have an object distinctly before his mind. I speak now of secret prayer. Many people go away to their closets... and instead of having anything to say, any definite object before their mind, they fall down on their knees, and pray for just what comes into their minds, for everything that floats in their imagination at the time. When they have done, they can tell hardly a word of what they have been praying for. This is not effectual prayer. All the instances of effectual prayer recorded in the Bible were of this kind. Wherever you see that the blessing sought for in prayer was attained, you will find that the prayer which was offered was prayer for that definite object.

2. Prayer, to be effectual, must be in accordance with the revealed will of God. To pray for things contrary to the revealed will of God is to tempt God. There are three ways in which God's will is revealed to men for their guidance in prayer.

- (a) By express promises or predictions in the Bible that He will give or do certain things. Either by express promises in regard to particular things, or promises in general terms, so that we may apply them to particular things.
- (b) Sometimes God reveals His will by His providence. When He makes it clear that such and such events are about to take place it is as much a revelation as if He had written it in His Word.
- (c) By His Spirit. When God's people are at a loss what to pray for, agreeable to His will, His Spirit often instructs them. Where there is no particular revelation, and providence leaves it dark, and we know not what to pray for as we ought, we are expressly told that "the Spirit also helps our infirmities," and "the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered."

3. To pray effectually, you must pray with submission to the will of God. Do not confound submission with indifference.

Do not confound submission in prayer with a general confidence that God will do what is right. It is proper to have this confidence that God will do what is right in all things. But this is a different thing from submission. What I mean by submission in prayer is acquiescence in the revealed will of God. To submit to any command of God is to obey it.

4. Effectual prayer for an object implies a desire for that object commensurate with its importance. If a person truly desires any blessing his desires will bear some proportion to the greatness of the blessing.

- (a) From the general benevolence of God. If it is a desirable object; if, so far as we can see, it would be an act of benevolence in God to grant it, His general benevolence is presumptive evidence that He will grant it.

(b) If you find yourself exercised with benevolent desires for any object there is a strong presumption that the Spirit of God is exciting these very desires, and stirring you up to pray for that object, so that it may be granted in answer to prayer. In such a case no degree of desire or importunity in prayer is improper. A Christian may come up, as it were, and take hold the hand of God. See the case of Jacob, when he exclaimed, in an agony of desire, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Was God displeased with his boldness and importunity? Not at all; but He granted him the very thing he prayed for.

5. Prayer, to be effectual, must be offered from right motives. Prayer should not be selfish, but dedicated by a supreme regard for the glory of God. A great deal of prayer is offered from pure selfishness. Women sometimes pray for their husbands, that they may be converted, because they say, "It would be so much more pleasant to have my husband go to meeting with me," and all that. They do not seem to think how their husbands are dishonoring God by their sins, and how God would be glorified in their conversion.

6. It must be persevering prayer. As a general thing, Christians who have backslidden and lost the spirit of prayer will not get at once into the habit of persevering prayer. Their minds are not in the right state, and they cannot fix their minds, and hold on until the blessing comes. If their minds were in that state that they would persevere till the answer comes, effectual prayer might be offered at once, as well as after praying ever so many times for an object.

7. If you intend prayer to be effectual it must be offered in the name of Christ. You cannot come to God in your own name. You cannot plead your own merits.

8. You cannot prevail in prayer without renouncing all your sins.

9. You must pray in faith. You must expect to obtain the things you ask for. You need not look for an answer to prayer, if you pray without any expectation of obtaining it.

Q: What new insight did you gain from Charles Finney?

Q: Is there anything you disagree with?

Q: How might you apply some of these principles?

Resources used in the creation of this small group study

Serendipity Bible for study groups

Thessalonians – How can I be sure? LifeGuide Bible study by Inter Varsity Press

1 Thessalonians Life Change Bible study by Nav Press

1 & 2 Thessalonians Bible Study by N.T. Wright

1 & 2 Thessalonians Bible Study – Living in the End Times by John Stott