

# The Christian's Progress Through The Local Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] Back to 12 through 15. Let's just read that section once more. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.

To esteem them highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, to admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, and to be patient with them all.

See to it that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Amen. A couple of years ago, Ashlyn and Harper decided that they wanted to share a room together.

We had gotten into this point. They had separate rooms. We'd gotten to this point where most nights they were kind of sleeping in the same room anyways. They were playing together in the same room, and they wanted to join rooms together, but the regular bedrooms were too small. So Julie and I moved them in together into a large bonus room that is above our garage. And it functions really like quite a multi-purpose room.

[ 1 : 11 ] It's part bedroom. It's part schoolhouse where they do their school during the day. And it's part music studio with Harper's piano and with Ashlyn's violin where they practice music and prepare for that throughout the week.

Now, to be honest, I don't go in there very much. But every once in a while, it's necessary for me to step in for one reason or another.

And sometimes stepping into that room is breathtaking. And I don't mean that in like it's really beautiful and it smells really nice way. I mean it's breathtaking in that there's a lot happening, and there's two girls living there.

One that's a teenager and one that's almost a teenager. And sometimes entering in there is not quite as pleasant and orderly as you might expect.

There's so many purposes for the room that just going a couple of days without trying to straighten up can really cause quite a problem. And you can step in and sometimes if we're not careful, it just kind of seems as if it's a random bunch of things that are kind of scattered about with no rhyme or reason.

[ 2 : 26 ] It's just kind of a mess that needs to get sorted out and properly ordered. We all know what that's like. Half the time, mine and Julie's room is the same way. When we come to this particular passage and we look at this final section of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, it appears at first a bit like an unkept bedroom with a few scattered thoughts that need to be sorted out and organized if we're going to make any kind of sense of it.

But having carefully walked through the letter, we know that there really is actually nothing random or scattered at all in this text.

Every instruction that we just read, every admonishment from Paul corresponds to a feature that is covered elsewhere in the letter.

So what's happening in this final section is Paul is giving his final notes regarding how the Thessalonian Christians should be living as they await the coming of the Lord.

He's covered all of this stuff and now he's almost summarizing it with just some final notes, but all of it corresponds. All of it's ordered and structured for a particular reason and for a purpose.

[ 3 : 44 ] Their eyes are still set on the coming of the Lord. And now he's giving one final set of practical instructions for how they are to live as they await that moment. And all of these instructions, indeed really all of the letter, reaches a climax in verses 23 and 24.

Just look at those verses with me again. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He who calls you as faithful, he will surely do it. That's the climax of the letter. Everything in the letter is building toward that final benediction. Everything in this section is building toward this final benediction.

So then we know that what Paul writes in verses 12 to 22 has to do with the Christian's sanctification.

He makes that plain. He's praying that God will sanctify them completely. What is our sanctification? It's our progress in holiness or impurity.

[ 4 : 55 ] That's what Paul is aiming at here. But we also find out that this sanctifying work is fundamentally an act of God's grace that he will be faithful to complete when Jesus returns.

And yet, he says in those verses that the Thessalonians and by extension all of us believers are to pursue a blamelessness that God calls us to.

That there is a kind of blamelessness that should be true of us not because Christ returns but in light of Christ's return. And of course, we are to pursue that now in the power of his spirit.

Verses 12 to 22 then contains a few practical ways that the Thessalonian church in particular needed to pursue greater purity in preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Now, in verses 16 to 22, the focus is especially on the Christian's attitude toward God and the ordinary means of the Spirit's work.

[ 6 : 07 ] We're going to set that aside for now. We're going to come back to that next Sunday and zero in on it. But today, I want to draw your attention to verses 12 and 15 as we see what God says through Paul about the believer's spiritual progress, our sanctification, and how it relates to the congregation and its leaders.

That's what this section is about. It is practical instruction in the pursuit of purity, specifically as it has to do with the Christian and his church.

So not only is our sanctification revealed in how we personally relate to one another and to our pastors, but we find in this text that faithful, intentional, meaningful, congregational life is a means of God that he uses to sanctify his people in preparation for Christ's return.

Are you with me? That was a lot of words. But what are we learning here? That the Lord uses his people and their relationship with a local church to prepare them for Christ's return.

So that when he does return, we might have this blamelessness that he speaks of and prays for in verse 24. Now there's two units here that we're going to deal with.

[ 7 : 38 ] The first one is this. The first instruction can be summarized this way. We need to follow faithful leaders. Follow faithful leaders.

Look again at verses 12 and 13. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work, and to be at peace among yourselves.

Now we saw the example of faithful spiritual leadership in chapter 2. Paul preached the gospel of Jesus as his first priority, and he did so with the kind of integrity that marked him out from the other religious and philosophical charlatans of his day.

He said that like a nursing mother, he dealt gently and affectionately with the young church, sacrificially giving his time and his effort and his money for their good.

He worked hard not to burden them. And like a loving father, he said, he exhorted them to walk in a way that was worthy of God, displaying the glory of God's kingdom on earth.

[ 8 : 54 ] The problem at this point, at the end of the letter, though, as we've come to see, is that Paul isn't there. What we read about his leadership in chapter 2 is there for example, but Paul is not in Thessalonica anymore, and the church needed to learn how to respect and esteem the leaders that they had.

And so the first unit here, practically, how are we going to pursue purity as it relates to congregational life? We need to follow faithful leaders, Paul says. There's four parts to his instruction here.

The first thing that I want you to see is the objects of our respect and esteem. The objects of our respect and esteem. Look again at verse 12. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you, are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.

Who exactly are we to give this special respect and esteem? Paul uses three descriptors here, doesn't he? Those who labor among you, those who are over you in the Lord, and those who admonish you.

Now Paul isn't speaking about three different groups of people or three kinds of people in the church. He is referring to the particular responsibilities of the office of elder or pastor.

[10:20] And we know that it was Paul's custom to establish pastors in the churches as he traveled. And whether he did this initially during his time in Thessalonica, maybe Timothy played a role in this as he went back as Paul's messenger and as Paul's ministry partner later on.

We don't know. What we do know is that the Thessalonians had a group of elders. There were men there that Paul had affirmed and recognized to serve the church as their pastors.

And following the example that he set for them, and that we read about in chapter 2, these men were responsible for shepherding the church under Christ.

Now I want to linger for just a moment on these three descriptors. As what they do is paint a portrait of faithful pastoral leadership.

The first descriptor is that they labor among you. Who is it that the congregation is to give their respect and esteem in the context of this passage? Those who labor among you.

[11:28] Like Paul, these men were marked by diligence in their service to the church. They worked hard to care for the people.

They were among them as often as they could be. Bringing two helpful reminders to us about what elders are to be like. What pastors in the church are to do.

Number one, they can't be lazy. Laziness is a disqualifying sin in pastoral leadership. Second, we are reminded here that shepherds smell like sheep.

They labor among the people. Not above the people. Not outside the people. They labor among them.

They're with them. They live their lives in such a way that they know the people that they serve. That the people that they serve and that they lead can see their lives.

[12:38] Not only as an example to follow, but live close enough. Engage closely enough. That there can be mutual discipline that is carried out between the two parties.

They labor among you. Paul says, respect these men. Esteem these men. Second, they're over you in the Lord.

They're over you in the Lord. Pastors are overseers who are responsible for leading the church. Exercising oversight of its members and its ministries.

We see this clearly in 1 Peter 5 and verse 2. Peter says to the elders there, They are to shepherd the flock of God that is among you. Exercising oversight.

Not under compulsion. Not because they feel like they have to or somebody strong-armed them into agreeing to serve in the role. No. But they are to do it willingly. They're to have a heart for it.

[13:41] They're to have a burden for it. As God would have you. They're not to do it for shameful gain, Peter says. But eagerly. Not domineering over the people.

But providing an example in their leadership. They are exercising oversight in the Lord. Of course, elders and pastors, they don't possess absolute authority.

Absolute authority belongs only to Jesus. But under Christ, they have a real spiritual authority over the church. And the emphasis here in 1 Thessalonians is on their oversight in the Lord.

They labor among you and they are over you in the Lord. That's the emphasis here. These men are not self-appointed. Neither do they lead based on their own will.

They are called by God. They are affirmed by the church. They lead on the basis of Christ's will for his people.

[14:47] And we see this again plainly in Acts chapter 20 and verse 28. Paul addresses the elders in Ephesus. And he says, pay careful attention to yourselves. Pay careful attention to all the flock, to the church.

In which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. They weren't self-appointed. The Holy Spirit of God raised them up.

Making that clear to the congregation. So that in affirming them as the leaders. The congregation could then turn. And respect them as those whom God had put over them in the Lord.

I might find it helpful just to make this statement at this point. As a pastor of this church. I will always be your servant. But you will never be my master.

That belongs only to Christ. I serve you as I serve Christ. I serve you not on the basis of everything that I want.

[ 15 : 50 ] I serve you, Lord willing, on the basis of what Christ has said in his word. Exercising wisdom and oversight based on what we see in the scriptures. That's the role of an elder.

That's the role of a pastor. And Paul comes to these Thessalonians and he says, as we're preparing for the coming of the Lord. As we're thinking about congregational life and pursuing purity.

There's a way that we need to regard the men who are laboring over us. Whom God has placed there as gifts to the church. In order to serve us by serving Christ.

And we need to respect and esteem them. But there's a third descriptor here, isn't there? They admonish you. And what does this remind us of? That the core responsibility of elders is to teach the Bible.

That's the core responsibility that your pastors have. Teach the Bible. Preaching it to the church corporately. And then using it to counsel and warn and instruct privately.

[ 16 : 54 ] That's my job. Is to shepherd you under Christ with his word. To proclaim his gospel. And to help you understand how his gospel and his word instructs your life.

That's my role. That's any pastor's role in this church. Paul says, Those who do it, We need to respect and to esteem highly. That would appear that these men were doing this.

Not only does the church in Thessalonica have a faithful group of elders. But Paul says, They're laboring among you. They are over you in the Lord. They're not self-appointed. God has put them there for your good.

And they are admonishing you. They're being faithful. And he says, Insofar as they are being faithful to do these things, We are to relate to them with respect and esteem.

And as we relate to them in that way, It only helps us. And benefits our walk with Christ. That's the objects of our respect and esteem.

[ 18 : 02 ] Secondly, I want you to see the nature of our respect and esteem. Look again at verse 13, Just the first part. We are to esteem them highly in love. Highly in love.

Now, How exactly are we to relate as a congregation to the elders of the church? What does it actually mean to respect and esteem them highly?

Well, Behind this word respect is the word for remembering. Perhaps you'll remember from our study in Judges last year or two years ago, Whenever that was, There are so many times in the Old Testament where Israel is either commanded to remember the Lord, Or they're rebuked because they have not done so.

Remember is the emphasis of the instruction that they're given. What does that mean? It's not that the Israelites had literally forgotten God.

It's not a mental lapse. To remember the Lord meant that Israel would acknowledge his power and authority, That they would submit to his rule in their life.

[ 19 : 09 ] That's what's behind this word respect here. It is to acknowledge and recognize the spiritual authority that our elders have under Christ by respecting the office.

And then there's this word esteem. To esteem very highly, It simply means to think much of those who shepherd our souls. Not undeservedly, But as they are faithful to the descriptors in the previous verse.

Now there's some other texts that help us fill this out in the New Testament, right? What does it mean to relate to the pastors of the church in respect and high esteem? In Hebrews chapter 13, We get a glimpse of this.

In verse 7, The writer says, Remember your leaders. That's that word again. Respect. Remember. Remember your leaders. Those who spoke to you the word of God.

They're being faithful to do their job the right way. Remember them. Consider the outcome of the way of life. And imitate their faith. And then he goes on to say in verse 17, Obey your leaders.

[ 20 : 17 ] And submit to them. Why? For they are keeping watch over your souls. As those who will have to give an account to God for doing it. Let them do this with joy.

Let them do this with joy. He says. And not with groaning. For that would be of no advantage to you. So in Hebrews 13, What do we find is the way that we relate to the elders of the church.

We are told to remember them. We are told to imitate them. We are told to obey them. We are told to submit to them. We are told to make their task joyful.

And not worthy of groaning. And we find in 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 5. Peter says after addressing the elders. And what their responsibility is to the church. And to love and care for the church. He then turns his attention to the church itself. And he says. Likewise be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves. All of you with humility toward one another. [ 21 : 16 ] For God opposes the proud. But gives grace to the humble. When we learn about how we relate to the elders there. We are subject to their leadership. Humble in the way that we relate to them.

Then there is 1 Timothy chapter 5. Verses 17 to 20. Let the elders who rule well. That is the overseer language. Let the elders who rule well. Be considered worthy of double honor. Especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the scripture says. You shall not muzzle an ox. When it treads out the grain. And the laborer deserves his wages. Do not admit a charge against an elder. Except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin. Those elders who persist in sin. Rebuke them in the presence of all. So that the rest may stand in fear. So they are subject to discipline. This is. That is why we say. It is not an absolute authority that they have.

[ 22 : 14 ] But what does that passage tell us about? How do we relate to the elders of the church? Well he says double honor. He says that. If there is a charge to be brought about them. That it should be done carefully. That it should be done.

With sufficient evidence. And witnesses. And if it is found to be true. They are to be properly disciplined. Like anybody else. What's the nature of this respect and esteem? What's all of these things? Third. We see. The reason. For our respect and esteem. The reason. Look again at verse 13.

Esteem them very highly in love. And I failed to mention that. All of this is rooted in love. But then he says we do this. Because of their work. Because of their work.

And this is such an important qualification. For this command. The reason. The reason. For this unique respect. And esteem. Is because of the work.

[ 23 : 12 ] That they do. The emphasis. Is on the office. And it's duty. Not on the personality. Of the man. Who feels it.

That's important here. Insofar. As the elders of the church. Faithfully execute. The ministry. According to verse 12.

Laboring among the people. Giving faithful oversight. In the Lord. According to the Lord's word. And admonishing them. With the Bible. In so far.

As the elders faithfully. Execute that ministry. And that office. We are to respect. And esteem them. In love. It doesn't matter their age. It doesn't matter. Their level of giftedness.

It doesn't matter. If they're a better preacher. Or a worse preacher. Than the other guy. It doesn't matter. Their personal history. And what personal history. We may even have with them. We must honor.

[ 24 : 08 ] The work. That they do. Esteem them highly in love. Because of their work. Now you're very fortunate. That there's not.

Another pastor in this area. That is as good looking. And as charismatic. And as gifted. As a leader. As what you have. Of course. None of that's true.

But one of the ways. That we. That we respect. And we honor the elders. Is that we honor their work. Not their particular successes. Or failures in it.

Not their personalities. And whether or not. This one is one that. We like better than another one. We can't do it that way. It can't be based on those things. It must be based on their faithfulness. To feel the task.

The emphasis is on the office. Not on the personality. Forth. What's the product. Of this respect and esteem. The product of this respect and esteem.

[ 25 : 05 ] Look at the end of verse 13. Be at peace among yourselves. Be at peace among yourselves. Now that's not a random statement. Paul writes it here.

For a reason. It implicates both the congregation. And its elders. Leaders must.

Pursue peace. By not pridefully. Dominating the people. As Peter said in 1 Peter 5. Would be a sin for them. They pursue peace.

By not dominating the people. Or insisting on their own way. In all things. The congregation. Then must pursue peace. By respecting and esteeming. The office that they feel. Even in moments of. Disagreement. Disagreement. And when we do this. When the leaders of the church. Are faithful to do what God has called them to do in the Lord.

[ 26 : 03 ] And when the congregation is faithful to respect and esteem them. Because they are being faithful to that work. What is the product? Peace. Peace. There's almost the suggestion in this.

That an undercurrent of dissension existed in the church. Now we know it wasn't because of any disqualifying sin in the elders. Because Paul would have addressed that.

He would have told the church that they needed to remove them for the disqualifying sin in their lives. And because he doesn't do that. We know that there was something else that maybe was happening here.

This church loved Paul. Timothy proved it when he came back with this report. He said they miss you just as much as you miss them. They want you to be there just as much as you want to be there.

And perhaps, maybe, something was happening in the church where they were showing less respect and esteem for the elders that they had. Than what they would have shown for Paul.

[ 27 : 01 ] Maybe. Maybe because of that the elders were a little offended. And making things a little harder on the people in the church. Because of their own sensitivities.

And what is that going to result in? War. Right? War in the church. Paul says no. Be at peace. How? The leaders need to be faithful.

And the church needs to respect and esteem them for their faithfulness. And when that happens. There's peace. And when there's peace between the church and its leaders. What does everybody grow in?

Blamelessness. They're taught the word. They're disciplined by the word. Both sides. And we grow in holiness. As we await the return of our Savior.

And of our Lord. The spiritual health of a church is seen in the faithfulness of its pastors. And the respect of the congregation for the office that they hold.

[ 28 : 01 ] Spiritual leadership then is a means that God uses to sanctify his people. And if we are to be faithful to Christ.

We must relate properly to the pastors that he gives us. What does that mean for us practically? What does that mean we are to do? Well just at least just three practical applications here.

Number one. We need to take the office seriously. We need to take the office of pastor, elder, overseer. All the same office in the New Testament. We need to take it seriously.

Understanding the weightiness of it. Being careful as we relate to those who hold it. And affirm those who should hold it. Second. Second. We need to be quite careful.

To recognize only men who have the character, competence, and heart for the work.

[ 28 : 59 ] We need to be sure. That when we affirm someone in the office of elder. And install them as a congregational church. That they are those who clearly have the mark of the Holy Spirit on their life.

Consistent with Acts 20, 28 that we read just a moment ago. That their oversight in the Lord. Is because the Lord has clearly appointed them to this task. And the church can clearly see it.

Third. We need to respond to them then. In humble submission. As they care for our souls. Under Christ. That's the first unit.

Second unit comes to us in verses 14 and 15. Where we find that. A good summary of the instruction might be this. Paul says you are to meaningfully.

Disciple. One another. Meaningfully. Disciple. Disciple. Other Christians. Now in this second unit here.

[ 30 : 04 ] The focus that shifts from following faithful leaders. To meaningfully engaging. In discipling relationships with fellow believers. Now let's just understand the terminology.

Let's get on the same page here. A disciple. Is someone who follows Jesus as Lord and Savior. Discipling. Here. Discipling. The verb form of that word. Is when disciples.

Those who are following Jesus. Help each other. Follow Jesus. Better. Follow Jesus. More faithfully. That's at the heart of what's happening here.

Paul is saying. Not only are you to respect and esteem your leaders. Follow faithful men in the church. But then you got to help each other. Meaningfully engage in congregational life.

He says. And of course. Undergirding these commands. Is the assumption. Of a covenant relationship. Between Christians in a local church. What we call church membership.

[ 31 : 03 ] Or partnership. Relationship. These instructions here in 14 and 15. They only make sense. When a Christian recognizes his or her relationship.

To a particular church community. And that the pastors and members of that congregation. Understand who actually belongs to their spiritual care.

Nothing Paul says here makes sense. Without that covenant relationship. This doesn't make sense. It can't be lived out faithfully. Apart from something like this. So let me encourage you.

Maybe on the fringes of this church. Or another church. Let me just encourage you. Fully covenant with a church. A faithful church. For your own spiritual good. That's what's undergirding this.

Here in this passage. Now within the covenant community of the church. Christians are responsible. To oversee one another's discipleship.

[ 32 : 03 ] Under Christ. And that's what this second unit is all about. Let's read it together. In verse 14. We urge you brothers. Admonish the idle. Encourage the faint hearted.

Help the weak. And be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone. Evil for evil. But always seek to do good. To one another. And to everyone.

Now certainly pastors bear a unique responsibility in this task. But notice that the command is not given especially to the elders of the church.

It's given to the congregation itself. The whole church. The whole church. We know that because he doesn't change his designation at all. He says we urge you brothers.

Which he said a number of times already in the letter. Every time. Meaning the brothers and sisters in the church. Those who belong to the church in Thessalonica. He's addressing everyone with this command.

[ 33 : 04 ] And elders lead in it to be sure. But elders are also to equip the congregation. To do the task themselves.

We see that in Ephesians 4. Which we've studied often. And when this is done faithfully. The church caring for itself. When done faithfully.

By the entire congregation. What happens? Christians grow in their sanctification. As they await Christ's return. As we look to our leaders.

And then as we endeavor to help one another. What happens? We pursue this blamelessness that Paul prays for. In verse 24. Now Paul touched on this in his prayer at the end of chapter 3.

Showing that perseverance of faith and maturity. Is a community project. But still the church needed to learn.

[ 34 : 04 ] How to help one another. So what Paul does in these two verses. Is he taught them. How to practice discipling. This is how to practice. This mutual soul care.

That should exist within the local church. Two things to point out. Number one. We must care for people individually. We must care for people individually.

Verse 14. We urge you brothers. Admonish the idle. Encourage the faint hearted. Help the weak. Be patient with them all. Now I want you to notice how Paul taught them. To recognize individual needs. And respond in a way that is appropriate.

To those needs. What's absent from this command. Are the meaningless platitudes. That we're so quick to offer to people.

[ 35 : 04 ] Meaningless platitudes. Are useless. In discipleship. There is no basic solution. For all spiritual problems.

We cannot simply tell people. Who are struggling with one thing or another. That they just need to read their Bible. And pray more. And expect suddenly that their sins disappear. And that their discouragements dissipate.

And that their needs. Are suddenly met. It just doesn't work that way. Of course the word is at the heart of it all. And yes. The gospel is the answer.

But when it comes to discipling. We can't engage with one another. In these meaningless platitudes. All for a basic prayer. And just expect that it's going to help. Help. And I want to prove that to you here.

In this text. Faithful discipling. Takes care. To know. The individual. To truly understand.

[ 36 : 02 ] Their issue. And to respond. With biblical wisdom. That is appropriate. To that need. You want to say that again.

Faithful discipling. Takes care. To know the individual. To understand. Their issue. And to respond. With biblical wisdom. That is appropriate. To that need. And I want you to consider. The three situations. That Paul brings up. One.

Is a sin problem. One. Is a discouragement problem. And one. Is a physical problem. All three issues.

All three issues alluded to. At other places in the letter. The idol. That's the sin problem. Needed to be. Admonished.

[ 36 : 58 ] Warned. Corrected. Instructed. The faint hearted. That's the discouragement problem. Needed to be.

Encouraged. The weak. That's the physical problem. Needed to be. Helped. Helped. In their weakness.

Now listen. It would do the idle person. No spiritual good. To be encouraged. It wouldn't do them any good.

It wouldn't affect their idleness. At all. You couldn't just go to the idle. And say no worries. Jesus paid for your sin anyways. You can't just say that. Is that true?

Yes. It's true. Does that help them grow in holiness? Not at all. Why? What is it that they need? He says they need to be admonished. It means warned.

[ 37 : 56 ] They need to be warned about their idleness. They need to be warned that habitual idleness is going to prove that they don't actually have a regenerate heart. They need to be warned so that they might repent and turn.

You can't just go to them with some kind of meaningless platitude and it actually make a difference. It would do the faint hearted no spiritual good to be admonished.

Someone struggling with discouragement because they're having a hard time in their life for one reason or another. In the case of the Thessalonians, they're being persecuted. Not because of sin, but because of their faith.

And they're discouraged. Some of them are confused about what's happening to their friends in Christ who are dying. And they're not exactly sure about some of the doctrines and what that means.

They're discouraged. What is it that they need? They don't need somebody to come and browbeat them to death about how they just need to read their Bible more and pray more. What do they need? They need encouragement. They need encouragement through doctrine.

[ 38 : 55 ] They need somebody to love them and build them up in the gospel. That's what they need. It would do the weak person no good. No good merely to receive words of encouragement.

It's a physical need. It's a physical need that they have. James says this. Remember what James says in his letter. James says it does no one any good if they're poor for you to walk up and say, oh God bless you.

I pray that he will clothe you and feed you today. James says foolish. It means nothing. What are we to do? Get them some food.

What are we to do? Buy them some clothes. What are we to do? Offer some real help. Help. Do you see? Do you see what's happening here?

This discipling. This mutual soul care. It demands meaningful care. And we all desperately need other Christians to help us according to our particular needs.

[ 39 : 56 ] We need one another. And we need one another to help us individually. You can't help me the same way that you're going to help Terry or that you're going to help Courtney or that you're going to help Evelyn.

I don't need the same kind of help today that Evelyn needs as she awaits for Bob and his surgery and his recovery in the next few weeks. She needs something specific.

You know what she needs? It's for our church to love her according to that need. And we can go through the whole church and we can say if we're going to do this well we need to actually know one another.

We need to pay attention to one another and stop just pretending to be members that care. We need to truly care. Now the spirit with which we are to do this work is twofold and it's almost paradoxical isn't it?

On the one hand, this intentional discipling, it requires urgency. That's the word he uses. He says, I urge you brothers, urgency.

[ 41 : 03 ] Don't let it go. Don't be casual. The one who's in sin, don't just wait and see what happens. The one who's discouraged, don't just think, well, they'll have a better day tomorrow.

The one who's weak, don't think, well, somebody else will deal with it. No, there's urgency here, isn't there? There's urgency to come around each other and to help each other in the Lord. But then almost paradoxically, there's this other spirit qualification at the end where he says that we are to be patient with everyone.

Patient. So on the one hand, there's urgency. On the other hand, our efforts must be clothed in patience. Patience. Meaning that the first time that you approach somebody who's struggling in sin, they might not respond the first time.

You know what you need? Patience. The first time you go to coffee with the person that's just struggling with some discouragement, they might not feel better after that first coffee.

You know what you need? Patience. Patience. Those people that you're trying to help with their physical needs. Just because you do it once doesn't mean that they're not going to have the same need tomorrow. You know what they need?

[ 42 : 15 ] Patience. Patience. Urgency. Patience. Patience. intentional heart level soul care and as we do that we trust that as we are faithful to serve one another that the holy spirit will be faithful and fruitful in his sanctifying work as we do those things it helps us to live blameless as we await the coming of christ now there's a second part to this in verse 15 not only are we to care for people individually we are to care for people generally generally look again at verse 15 see that no one repays anyone evil for evil but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone now in this verse paul seems to be moving from issues that are specific to individuals to temptations that are common to the whole church and given what we know about the persecution in thessalonica it's not hard to see why they would be tempted by this sin of retribution or this sin of vengeance that's what he's dealing with see to it that no one repays anyone evil for evil honestly it's a general temptation that wasn't only true for the church in thessalonica but it's true for all christians isn't it's true for all people in any age especially in overly litigious societies like ours but the scriptures routinely confront the spirit of vengeance they continually confront the spirit of retribution as a serious sin that is itself distinct from what we would say is justice right let me just show you a few passages

Matthew 5 38 and 39 you probably know this well listen to what jesus said you've heard that it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth for a tooth that's evil for evil right that's retribution and there were people in israel that were teaching that that was right that vigilante justice idea but i say to you says jesus do not resist the one who is evil but if anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to him the other also if anyone would sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well if anyone forces you to go one mile go with him two miles there's cultural context behind that that you can study on your own what is it that jesus is getting at he's not saying that we have to let injustices go that's not what he's saying what he's saying is that we should not be driven by a heart and a spirit of retribution and vengeance toward those who do us wrong peter talks about it first peter chapter three he says plainly do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling but on the contrary bless for to this you were called that you may obtain a blessing romans chapter 12 and verse 17 repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of everyone now in our text paul builds on those other commands that are just issued directly to christians doesn't he he builds on it but he changes it in a different way he addresses the sin of retribution but he tasked the congregation with seeing to it that no one was driven by such a spirit do you see that he says brothers church you see to it that no one among you does this there are sins that all of us will be tempted by and we must meaningfully engage with one another to avoid falling into such sins now of course abstaining from retribution and vengeance is foreign to modern sensibilities probably even ancient sensibilities but if you're here and you're not a christian today i want to point out that our model for this is jesus himself in fact why don't you just turn with me to first peter chapter two first peter chapter two first peter chapter two look with me at verses 21 to 25 peter addressing christians he says for for to this you have been called because christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps he committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you've been healed for you

were straying like sheep but have now returned

to the shepherd and overseer of your souls i want you to meditate on this especially if you're not a christian i want you to see this is this is where we get this from jesus is our example there has been no greater injustice that the world has ever seen nothing greater than the murder of the sinless son of god isn't that what peter's saying jesus committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth he did not revile against those who reviled him on the way to the cross he did not threaten those who nailed him to the cross as he suffered he did none of those things it was a great injustice yet even then he did not revile or threaten what did he do he entrusted his cause to god the father and in doing so the world's greatest injustice brought about man's greatest good christ death provides forgiveness to all who will trust him as savior and follow him as lord that includes you you should be thankful that he did not revile because that would have been sin which meant that his sacrifice wasn't sufficient for your sin be thankful that he didn't threaten that would have been sin meaning that his sacrifice was not sufficient we don't receive salvation for refusing retribution and doing good christians refuse retribution and do good because they have received salvation by faith in jesus and they want to live as he lived and jesus calls us to a radically different life rather than repaying evil for evil which would be par for the course for most people we are to find ways to do good for everyone that's the positive end of the instruction isn't it look again at verse 15 see to it that no one repays evil for evil but instead always in every circumstance!

seek look for intentionally do good to everyone we're to find ways to do good to those in the church and those out of the church to those we count as friends to those we see as enemies isn't this what jesus taught us in matthew 5 he said you've heard it said that you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy but i say to you love your enemies pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven for god makes his son rise on the evil and on the good and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust for if you love those who love you what reward do you have do not even the tax collectors do the same the unbelievers and if you greet only your brothers what more are you doing than others do not even the gentiles do that unbelievers you therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect when we live this way we show that we belong to god when we live this way we image him to the world around us jesus says when you do good and love even your enemies you act like god acts who allows the sun to come up even on those who hate him who provides food even for those who hate him who sends rain for the crops of even those who hate him when we live this way we show christ to the world but the point of the text is that we need each other's help to do it see to it that no one repays evil for evil but it's always looking to do good when you're at coffee and the person brings up that spirit of bitterness about the person who wronged them see to it that they don't repay evil for evil they need you to do that i need you to do that when they're looking for retribution against that person or that company or that whatever remind them do good trust it to the lord act the way god acts toward these people and leave the judgment to him we need each other to help with that i need you to help me with it now as we await christ's return we must pursue the blamelessness that he will complete in the end and what we find in these first two units of the four is that vital to our sanctification is engagement in the life of the local church that's the principle here that in order for us to have the blamelessness at christ's return that is prayed for in verse 24 we need to care about the church we need to engage with the church and its leaders in ways that are obedient to the lord so what do we take away well if you don't formally belong to a faithful church you need to you need to join one you need to covenant with one you need to learn to recognize and value faithful leaders submitting to their spiritual leadership and you need to meaningfully engage in the mutual soul care of the congregation and it is through these ordinary means of grace that god sanctifies his people and prepares us for christ's return  
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