

# 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

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[ 0 : 00 ] And in doing so, he expressed his own lack of hope, lack of hope that things could ever be different, lack of hope that Scotland could ever be free.

After the battle, Robert the Bruce is deeply convicted. He goes to see his father, and he says this to his father, those men who bled the ground red at Falkirk fought for William Wallace.

He speaks for something that I never had, and I took it from him when I betrayed him. I saw it in his face on the battlefield, and it's tearing me apart.

And his father, the cynic, says, all men betray, all lose heart. And Robert the Bruce responds, I don't want to lose heart.

I want to believe as he does. I will never be on the wrong side again. It's a powerful point.

[ 1 : 05 ] It's a powerful picture in the movie of losing heart. And there are times when I wonder if we in the church have become like Robert the Bruce.

If we have lost heart that things could ever really, truly be different. If we have allowed ourselves to settle for a form of Christianity, for a form of church life that is not really transformed.

We don't believe it in our church, and we don't believe it maybe for our own lives. And I don't know about you, but I know for me it could look like this.

It starts with a disappointment, a disappointment from God. Maybe it's something hard that I've had to face. Maybe it's been looking at my own spiritual failure or a place where I feel like I haven't grown the way I want to.

The place where the fruit that I've longed for hasn't quite seen so abundant and sweet as I'd wanted. And in that disappointment, I retreat in self-protective mode.

[ 2 : 19 ] I close off my heart to what God might want to do in my life and in my community. And I become resigned. Resigned to just kind of hanging in there till the end, hoping it won't get worse, but not really hopeful it will ever get better.

Friends, I want to tell you this morning that this passage has been deeply challenging for me personally. It's made me ask questions. What do I look for?

What do I long for in my own relationship with God? What do I really long for, for our church, and for what the life of this church could be like? I've been faced with the question, have I become resigned?

Or do I still have hope in the transforming power of the gospel? Have I given in to despair? Or do I really believe that there is a living God at work among us today?

And maybe this morning, you are like me, facing those questions. And if so, I come to give you hope and courage to remind you of the God that we serve.

[ 3 : 33 ] And maybe you're here this morning, and you're exploring Christianity, and you're wondering, what is it all about? And I hope that maybe as you hear this morning, you'll get to see a little bit more of the God who is at work among us.

The God who is at work among us. Our passage is a short one, just a few quick commands. It opens up a picture of what could be, of what can be, when God is truly at work.

It shows us what a gospel life could be like. So if you want to turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, it's page 988 in your pew Bibles.

And we're going to look at our passage. It's a brief, it's I think 20 words in the original language. It's five commands. It's the third in the series of very pithy, very short instructions to this church on how to live out the gospel life that they've been called into in Christ.

So if you want to look with me, we're going to start in verse 19, page 988, 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 19. This is what it says. Do not quench the spirit.

[ 4 : 49 ] Do not despise prophecies, but test everything. Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

In our passage this morning, God calls us to tend the flame of our gospel life. He calls us by doing two things.

First, to tend the flame of our gospel life by having a dynamic ministry of words, of words to one another. And then secondly, that this dynamic ministry of words to one another is meant to be grounded in a discerning and determined commitment to truth.

Why do I say this? Well, let's start by just stepping back for a minute before we explore this passage and think about what we know about Thessalonica. Turn back a few pages to chapter 1. I want you to remember the picture that we saw at the beginning of this book and why we've titled our series Because Our Gospel Came to You. Do you remember back at the beginning there was this picture of what happened when the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ had come and lived and died and rose again.

[ 6 : 07 ] And because of that, everything changed. Because he died for the sins of sinful people like you and me. Because he rose again to conquer sin and death and offer life and hope to all who believe.

Everything changed. Look with me at verse 4 in chapter 1 for a minute. And let's read it together. For we know, brothers, loved by God that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your own sake. And you became imitators of us and the Lord and you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything.

Do you remember what happened? Paul and his companions came and they proclaimed the gospel. And you know what? The Holy Spirit showed up and it took that proclamation and it changed these people's lives.

[ 7 : 27 ] It said that they came with power in the Holy Spirit. God himself took the word and was convicting them of sin showing them their need and revealing to them opening their eyes to the glorious truth of what God had done for them in Christ.

In verse 6 it said not only that but then they were filled. They were filled with joy in the Holy Spirit. Filled with joy in the Holy Spirit not because their lives were easy, not because their lives were comfortable but because in fact their faith in God had made their lives harder.

And in the midst of that hardness God had given them a joy, a joy of knowing God that outweighed all of the persecution and suffering that they experienced.

And not only did the Holy Spirit convict them of this and come in power and fill them with joy but then the Holy Spirit took this gospel message and like a gong it resounded through the lives of these believers so that people in the city and the cities around to the whole region of Macedonia and Achaia heard about their faith in God.

The word of the Lord that it was implanted in them by the Holy Spirit rang forth like a clarion bell to the whole area.

[ 8 : 55 ] And if we kept reading we would see that they were changed in their worship that they no longer served idols and man-made gods but they served the true and living God. That they changed their relationships and they loved one another sacrificially and painfully.

That they changed their character. They pursued God's ways of purity, of love, of serving, of working.

And they were changed in their hopes as they began to long not for success and not for comfort and not simply to survive but they longed for Jesus to return and to bring his kingdom with all the glorious fullness of it.

And Paul was reminding us as he was reminding the Thessalonian church back then that God had lit a flame. The word came.

The spirit set it afire. And that flame was real in them. And Paul says tend it. Tend the gospel. And that's what verse 19 is about of chapter 5.

[ 10 : 02 ] That's where he starts. He says don't quench it. Don't put it out. But then he defines that particularly in verse 20 by saying don't despise the prophecies.

Okay. What is that? Well I could spend my whole day this morning talking about it because there's a lot to be said.

But I'm going to give you a fairly brief definition. But what I want you to see is that he connects don't quench the spirit with don't despise the prophecy. So we've got to understand a little bit about what these prophecies are.

What is it? Well if it is nothing else it is this. It is words spoken from one to another in the church. And if we look at 1 Corinthians 14 chapter 3 it says this.

The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. So there's a purpose in scripture that's laid out.

[11:07] Whatever these prophecies are they're words spoken from one person to another in the church that has this effect. This building. This strengthening.

This comforting effect. Ephesians 4 19 and 20 reminds us that these words are meant to be timely and fitting words.

This is what Paul says there. He says let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths but only such as is good for building up as it fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

And he goes on he says and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. So what is prophecy? Prophecy? I'm going to duck this.

I'm probably going to disappoint almost all of you by my definition but here we go. Prophecy here in 1 Thessalonians 5 is words spoken by the prompting of God and I'll define that a little bit later for the encouragement and building up of others.

[12:18] What does this look like practically? Well it could simply be you know brother I was thinking of you and this verse came to mind and I wanted to read it. It could be saying you know you were just talking about how hard it is because you're looking for a job and you just don't know how God is going to provide and I want to remind you of what the Bible tells us that God is the provider.

That the Gentiles run after these things but your heavenly father knows what you need. It could look just like that. It might look like an insight into a situation or into someone's heart saying brother this is or sister this is what I'm thinking this is what I'm seeing what do you think does that seem true to you?

What is it not? New Testament prophecy is not the same as Old Testament prophecy. Why do I say that? Well Deuteronomy 18:20 says that if a prophet stands up and says thus says the Lord and then he speaks something that's not true they're to kill him because he speaks for God and God cannot lie.

But in the New Testament you see prophets both in 1 Corinthians 14 and here explicitly in 1 Thessalonians 5 God says no when they speak you're to test them and see whether what they say is true or not.

So it must be qualitatively a different thing than what the Old Testament prophets were doing. New Testament prophecy is also not a part of the ongoing revelation of scripture that has the same authority as scripture.

[13:58] Why do I say this? Well look down in 1 Thessalonians 5 to verse 27. Nick told me he's not going to preach on this next week so I get a shot at it.

1 Thessalonians 5 27 says this I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. That might not that might just be hey you should share this with other people but he says it so strongly I put you under oath.

Paul is not saying this is my letter to you you should test it to see whether it's true or not. Paul is saying I put you under oath read my words to the churches.

This is just a little bit of some of the evidence in the New Testament that when Paul was writing his letters were qualitatively different than the other teaching that was going the other prophesying that was going on in the church at a time and Paul knew it and the church knew it.

So New Testament prophecy is not continuing authoritative revelation in any way. Thirdly prophesying is not primarily about predicting the future.

[15:14] If you were here a couple of weeks ago you would have heard me on that on 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 at the beginning you would have heard it's not about figuring out the times and the seasons it's about forth telling who God is rather than foretelling what is going to happen.

But finally let me also say this New Testament prophecy is not simply reading scripture to one another. It's not simply teaching.

Teaching is distinguished from prophesying in various places various lists of gifts. There is something about it that is meant to be more of the in the in the ongoing relationship of one another in a church.

It is a verbal interaction between people that is meant to encourage and build up and comfort and point us to Christ. And it is something that the Spirit helps us to do.

It is the work of the Spirit prompting us to do this with one another. Now we have to put down we're putting down some channel markers and figuring this out because the church you probably are aware has had a lot of disagreement and discussion about what all these things work.

[16:38] So I'm putting down some channel markers about how this works in our church. One more thing I want to say is that New Testament prophecy is verbal ministry to others that reflects what we read in John 16 that the Holy Spirit will lead us into truth.

John 16, 13 He is the Spirit of truth who will lead us into all truth. And in that truth then John 16, 14 is that He will testify about me.

That the focal point of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and prophesying and the prompting of the Holy Spirit is not so that we get all excited that the Holy Spirit is but that we see Christ in all of His glory.

That we see Him in all of the splendor of His majesty. That we see Him in the depths of His grace and love for us. and that the Spirit is given so that Christ may be exalted.

And so we are to depend and to seek the Spirit but the focal point in the end is not that but it is Christ and the gospel that we've seen implanted in the Thessalonian church and in the church ever since.

[17:50] It is not about the excitement of new things. It is about the refreshment of the old, old story of the gospel.

An excitement that comes as that old, old story comes to us again and again with fresh power and newness and depth and reality.

I don't know if you've ever had this experience. Maybe you haven't but I can remember very distinctly when I was on the receiving end of a word like this and the funny thing is the guy who didn't even know that he was doing it.

I'm sure he was trusting in the Lord but he didn't do any, I'm sure that he didn't know what he was doing. I was sitting in a meeting where we were actually doing conflict resolution and the mediator who's there looked at me and he said you lack grace.

You lack a patient and kind understanding towards your brother in this circumstance and you betray that you need to grow in grace yourself and you need to extend grace to this brother in this circumstance.

[19:14] Now, that could have just been nice words but man, can I tell you, God used that word powerfully in my life. Not only did it help me resolve that conflict and that situation to the glory of God in so many ways I can't even tell you but also at that moment it was, and I can't explain it anyway, the Holy Spirit brought to mind this thought that that was why I was not married because I was not ready to be gracious towards a wife at that point.

And in that God began in me a journey of deepening in my ability to be gracious towards others that then in his mercy and grace Lord provided me with a wife two years later.

It was a good thing. It was a wonderful thing. But that's one of the ways that I have experienced what I think 1 Thessalonians 5 is looking at. Now I could have despised it.

I could have said I think you're wrong or I don't want to hear that or who are you to tell me or I'm, I don't, you know, I didn't win this conflict so I'm just going to take my marbles and go home.

I'm not going to play anymore. There are lots of sinful ways that we can despise the way that God speaks to us. But I think, I think that the picture here is to say we must not do that but we must look for this dynamic work of the Spirit amongst and through his people to one another whereby God reminds us and points us to the truth of who he is and reveals to us the truth of who we are in a way that has transforming power.

[21:12] What happens when this kind of ministry happens? What happens when people begin, when the Spirit begins to do this kind of work? I've shared this with some of you before but, you know, when I was in high school there were two believers in my freshman class.

Just two. And it wasn't me. And those two prayed and they asked God to work. And then they began to open their mouths and to share with their friends about the gospel. And one believed and then another believed and then another believed. And this community of friends then began to grow in the gospel together. together. And they studied the Bible so they would know God.

But then their community and their love for one another meant that they were challenging and encouraging and comforting one another with the gospel regularly. And they were living out, I think, this verbal ministry, this ministry of words to one another.

And it was like throwing fuel on a fire. And it just kept spreading. Their lives displayed transformation. God brought other people like me to see what was going on and kept bringing more and more people in.

[ 22 : 34 ] So just a word, if you're a high schooler here today and maybe you're one of those two in your high school thinking, man, can God ever do this? He can.

Don't give up hope. Pray. Ask God to work. Pray that God will open your mouth so that you might have words to speak to one another and to your friends about the good news of Jesus.

But you know, it doesn't just happen in the past and it doesn't just happen in high school. Many of you know this, but in this church, there's a group of people who travel 50 miles down from the Groton, New London area every Sunday to be a part of our church.

And if you haven't met them, you need to meet them. Because God is doing really, really cool things among them. As I hear them, and they're going to be really just sort of flabbergasted, but you should ask them, what is God doing in your midst?

What have you seen? Because as I've seen them, one of the things that is true about them is that they are seeking to grow in the gospel.

[ 23 : 45 ] They're seeking to do it together. They're speaking words of encouragement, of challenge, of exhortation, of comfort to one another. And God is at work in that.

They are not quenching the spirit of God. And even in, if I might say, in their pursuit of truth, in their pursuit of doctrinal clarity and depth of Bible knowledge, that has not undermined but has actually fed the sort of spirit reverberating word, gospel work among them.

And it's been really encouraging to see. And friends, it's not just here, but it's all over the world.

We're going to do some baptisms in a little while, and I don't actually know the whole story, so I'm going to find out with those how God has worked in their lives.

But if you ever want an encouraging story about God at work in the world, go read stories of the last 100 years of the gospel work in China.

Go hear about what God has done and is doing. And believe that God is not done. God wants to have a dynamic work amongst us, his people.

[ 25 : 10 ] God wants us to be those who tend the flame of the gospel life that he has put in us by having a dynamic ministry of words.

And I'll bring this back at the end and give us a more practical application as a church, but what I want you to see is what Paul goes on, that's not enough. It's not simply to say, yes, I want that dynamic work.

I want to see the Holy Spirit working, and I don't want to quench it. I want to hear words of prophecy, and I don't want to despise those things. But he goes on and he says that those things, that excitement, that anticipation of the Spirit at work must be grounded, must be grounded in a discerning and determined commitment to the truth.

This is the clearest positive command in the whole passage, isn't it? Verse 21, test everything. And again, in its context, he's talking about testing what is spoken.

He's not assuming that any of us have ultimate authority to say, I'm going to tell you and every word that comes out of my mouth will be complete truth. He's saying, test everything. Hold fast to what is good and let go of everything that is not.

[ 26 : 34 ] the word hold fast is a word that's used, I'm sorry, the word test, that's the word I meant to say. The word test is the word that's used of money changers at that time where they'd pick up a coin and they could tell by its weight and by the way that it handled itself and by the way you poked at it.

You could tell what was genuine and what wasn't. And Paul's saying that's what we're supposed to do with the words that are spoken. We're to test them. We're to examine them.

We're to evaluate them. Paul doesn't give us instructions about how, but it seems pretty clear, doesn't it? Well, first of all, does it line up with God's word? Is it true according to the thing that we know most clearly?

Secondly, does it have the kind of effect that it's supposed to? Does it edify? Does it build up? Does it encourage? Does it comfort? Does it point us to Christ?

Christ? And when it does, then we ought to listen to it, hold fast to it, and cherish it as part of the way God is at work in us.

[ 27 : 47 ] The question of how we do this, the church, if you looked at church history, there are wide swings in the church about this.

There's one strain of the church that has swung towards a very undynamic, scholarly, intellectual approach to understanding God's truth.

And then there's another strain of the church that is completely spontaneous, dynamic, exciting, but perhaps more committed to the excitement and the dynamism than the truth.

And friends, God calls us to bring these things together. This is exactly what this passage is saying. We are meant to have a dynamic experience of God at work in the Holy Spirit, in our community, grounded in the truth of God's word where we use every intellectual faculty we have, every brain cell that we can muster to know the truth more deeply.

It's like lighting a fire. Have you ever tried to light a fire? What do you need? You need two things, right? You need fuel and you need a flame. If you have lots of flame, like if I light a whole pack of matches at the same time and I have no fuel in 30 seconds, it's gone.

[ 29 : 16 ] And if I have the best pile of seasoned dry hardwood in the whole world and I have no flame, it's not going to do me any good.

The picture in Scripture is that God wants to bring these things together. The flame and the fuel, the knowledge of the truth with the flame of the Holy Spirit to ignite it and set it afire.

this is what God wants for our church. We need to know here in this second section, verses 21 and 22, we need to know the truth from falsehood.

We need to make sure we're not content with casual knowledge of Christ and his scriptures. We need to make sure that we understand in increasing form deeply the doctrines of grace, the character of God, the way that he has saved us, the truth about how God has made the world and how he reigns over it, the truth about our own souls and what it means to be human and how we live in the flow of Scripture and the creation, fall, redemption reality that we live in today.

Friends, the church is constantly in danger of losing the truth in the tides of cultural and intellectual thought. And so we must hold fast to the truth.

[ 30 : 46 ] But as we hold fast to the truth, let us not retreat into a bunker mentality or become resigned to it being dry wood piling up in our backyard.

But instead, let us build the fire of the gospel life in in our church. Puritan John Owen says this, some pretend to be guided by the spirit and neglect the written word.

Some despise the teaching of the spirit and trust their own understanding of the word. Others reject both spirit and word and go after another rule and guide. To none of these is the promise of the spirit given.

They are left to their foolish, corrupt imaginations. Scripture is a believer's rule and the Holy Spirit is his guide. Better words couldn't be spoken about this.

So what does it look like? Friends, if we have this spectrum, our church, if we have a tendency, we live over here.

[ 32 : 00 ] We live with dry wood and not so much flame. So what I want you to hear me saying as your pastor this morning is, I pray that we would ask God to light the fuel.

That we would have an expectant, prayerful longing for God to be at work in dynamic ways. When I saw it in my high school group, what I see going on in Groton, I long for that to be true in our whole church.

Where we just see the fingerprints of God at work through his word in ways that are beyond. And you know what? I do see this. But I long for more.

I long for more. And I want you to join with me in longing for more. I want to have this sense of expectation that God has things for our church.

And it will be his timing. It will be his work, not ours. But I pray that we would expect him to be at work in our church. And then how do we participate in that?

[ 33 : 10 ] Well, it's that we embrace this dynamic ministry of words to one another. Some of that will happen, Lord willing, through here.

I pray that there will be a characteristic of prophecy in the way that I preach, at least some of the time. I pray that the Holy Spirit is actually filling me so that the words that I speak are useful for you. And God is using them to do things in your heart. Some of it will happen in small groups, I think. As we study the word together and as we get into one another's lives, we have an opportunity as you gather every week to speak words of encouragement, speak words of hope, to speak words of truth.

But friends, the way that I see this living itself out most significantly and first in our church is just in the everyday. When you go downstairs after service this morning, will you ask that God would give you words to speak to someone that would encourage them?

Would you ask that the Lord would make your heart open to someone else coming up and speaking words and that God would use that interaction not just to shoot the breeze or to chat about the NBA playoffs or whatever is going on in your lives, but to actually talk about the truths of God and His kingdom and His word.

[ 34 : 39 ] That you would expect the Holy Spirit to be at work in the midst of that. That you'd be looking both to speak words to others and to receive words yourself that God might be at work in us.

Friends, this is my hope. I believe this is what the command of 1 Thessalonians 19 through 22 is, is that we would be this kind of church that would have this kind of gospel life in us that has a dynamic nature grounded in the truth that brings transformation so that the gospel would resound from our church to the city, to this region, and to the ends of the earth.

So if you're here this morning checking out Christianity, I hope you have gotten a taste of what I think the scripture is picturing it's supposed to be like.

We're probably not doing that perfectly, but I hope that He's putting you a longing to see that, to see a living God at work like that.

And if you, like me, are facing the challenge of, have I lost heart? Have I become resigned? Have I lost my expectation that God will work in this dynamic way?

[ 35 : 59 ] I pray that you would be renewed this morning. That the life that Christ has planted in you, that He will flame, that He wants to fan it into flame, and that the life that Christ has placed in us as a community, that He wants that to be a dynamic place where Christ is exalted and spoken forth.

Let's pray. God, we thank You. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You that, Lord, You have given us Your Spirit to guide us.

God, I do pray. I pray that our church would grow. I pray that our church would long. I pray that our church would seek You.

Lord, I pray that we would pray that this would be so. Pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.