

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for February 1: Do you get along with others?

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We've all heard the expression that someone might be "so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good." Now, there's certainly nothing wrong with being heavenly minded; indeed, in previous lessons we have seen how the Apostle Paul encouraged his readers to remain focused on the eternal realities of salvation, and to draw encouragement and comfort from those realities (4:13-18, 5:9-11).

But what about the "earthly good" part of the equation? How do we live lives that are informed and encouraged by eternal hope, but still are meaningfully practical to life on this earth?

As we come to this final lesson from the book of 1 Thessalonians, we discover some answers to that question. The lesson focuses especially on what these verses have to say about our relationships with other people.

Verses 12-13 begin with an encouragement to respect those who are leaders in the church. This instruction is given in light of the enormous importance of the work that the leaders of the church are called by God to do (v. 13).

Consider for a moment those people in your church whom God has called to places of leadership. How might you demonstrate respect and support for them, as you try to make personal application of this passage? Actions such as speaking words of encouragement to those who lead, offering to help with ministry tasks and speaking well of your leaders in your conversations with others are ways you might take this bit of instruction and turn it into

practical application.

The text then turns to our relationships not just with our leaders, but all those in the family of Christ. And truly, “family” is the most appropriate metaphor for church life as we examine Paul’s instruction in the next couple of verses, because the Christian life is a journey we are sharing along with others.

In verses 14-15, we are confronted with our responsibility to act in ways that build up and strengthen the family: We are to give encouragement to each other, issue warning when appropriate, help one another and show patience, recognizing we all are human and not a single one of us is perfect and beyond the need of grace and forgiveness. I cannot recall where I read it, but these words from a book long-forgotten still stick out in my mind: “From time to time, we all can be a burden and a pain to live with.”

Verses 16-22 contain a rapid-fire series of admonitions and instructions that speak to our relationship with God, but also have implications for our relationships with other people.

First among these is the command to be joyful people (v. 16). The fact that we are commanded to be joyful indicates joy, like love, is a choice we make. We might have little or no control over what happens in our lives, but we have total control over how we choose to respond to those life-events.

Joy not only changes our own experience and quality of life, it also bleeds over into our relationships with others. Life is filled with challenging problems, and it is my experience that joyful people make the best problem-solvers. A joyful spirit is an attractant to people whose lives lack that quality, and it creates opportunities for us to share the gospel of Christ, who is the source of our joy.

By praying continually and maintaining a spirit of gratitude to God (vv. 17-18), we stay in constant spiritual contact with the Father. As we engage

in those activities that strengthen our relationship to God, he creates a Christ-like spirit in us essential for God-honoring relationships with others.

The final section of our study passage has additional things to say about prayer. In verses 23-24, the apostle shared with the Thessalonians a prayer he offered to God on their behalf: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The word “sanctified” carries the idea of being set apart, or made holy. In the context of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, it means to be set apart to Christ for his use and his purposes. Verse 23 reminds us it is the goal of Almighty God to sanctify us entirely (“through and through”).

There is no portion of your life—spiritual, mental, emotional or physical—that God is willing to exclude from that process, or in which he is not actively working.

Having assured the Thessalonians he was praying for them (both here as well as in 1:2-3), Paul asked those believers in turn to pray for him (v. 25). Paul was no spiritual Superman who had grown beyond the necessity for others to lift him up to the Father in prayer; he acknowledged his deep need for others to pray for him, and wanted for the Thessalonians to be part of that ministry of prayer.

In every church there are some works of service and ministry that by their very nature are “out front” and public. Nearly everyone in the church sees and knows when those acts of ministry are being done. But other ministries of the church are like water pipes: They are, for the most part, out of sight and very quiet. Most people never see them, but nevertheless those “hidden” works of ministry are conduits through which life and refreshment flow. Prayer is a quiet and unseen ministry, but it is absolutely essential to the spiritual life and health of the church and of each believer.

I once heard a preacher state that being a disciple of Jesus is not just a way of doing certain things; it is a certain way of doing everything we do. These final verses of 1 Thessalonians confront us with the truth that our relationship to Jesus Christ must have a real connection to our relationships with other people. The question we now are challenged to answer is, "How well am I making that connection?"