



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD
P 01277 632120 **E** emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
T @EmmanuelCM12 **W** emmanuel-church.info **FB** EmmanuelChurchBillericay
Part of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry



HG178 Prayers Of The Apostle Paul Praying For The Church

1 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Home Group Study Notes

10 February 2019 - Pauline Woolnough



**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

How often do you fall asleep when you pray last thing at night? (Be honest!)



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG178 Prayers Of The Apostle Paul Praying For The Church

1 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Home Group Sermon

10 February 2019 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction This is one of Paul's earliest letters written to the Thessalonian church that he planted along with Timothy and Silas on his second missionary journey in around AD 51. He writes following a return visit to the church by Timothy a short time later to find out how they were doing. In this study we're looking at how Paul prayed for the church to see what we can learn and put into practice when praying for our church. Like Paul and James previously I have used as a resource DA Carson's "*A Call to Spiritual Reformation.*"

The church of course is not a building, an institution or religious organisation, the church is people, it is Christ's body, God's incarnate presence on earth. To be in Jesus Christ is to be part of his church as a genuine love for Jesus produces profound love for his church. You cannot love God if you don't love his people and the idea of a believer not affiliating with God's people is foreign to the New Testament. This important strategic city attracted many pagan religions and cultural influences that challenged the Christian message. Acts 17 tells the story and says in v2 "*As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service and for three sabbaths in a row he interpreted the scriptures to the people.*" Paul preached in the synagogue on only 3 occasions but as always, where the message is preached and accepted, opposition is not far away and after 3 weeks they were hounded out of Thessalonica by an angry mob of Jews and Gentiles.

The Authority of Scripture In vs 2-3 Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians and prays about 3 things, "*work produced by faith,*" "*labour prompted by love,*" and "*endurance inspired by hope.*" These qualities could only come about because of v 5, "*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.*" The Thessalonians responded to the message that Paul brought as divine revelation from God himself. Ch 2 13 "*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.*" The city was full of cult leaders and false teachers and their talk was empty and destructive, the people longed for a message that they could believe in so when they heard Paul's message of hope and life they were drawn to it. They got hold of the message and the message got hold of them.

30 yrs ago in another work by DA Carson, "*Recent Developments about Doctrine of Scripture*" he warned of the dangers of the diminishing authority of scripture and it's still relevant today. He said that "*A high view of scripture is of little value to us if we do not enthusiastically embrace the scripture's authority... to our shame we have hungered to be masters of the Word much more than we have hungered to be mastered by it.*"

4. How does Satan seek to destroy God's church today, are their examples of how he tries at Emmanuel and across the parish? What can we do to counter his strategy?

5. Many churches are ineffective or irrelevant when it comes to impacting the world, why is that and what can be done to revitalise them?

6. In what ways, if any, would you say that we are "*world changers*" at Emmanuel? How can the Thessalonians inspire our faith and impact our prayer life?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Paul mentions 3 ways in which the Thessalonians were changed on conversion: faith, love and endurance. Which of these is most evident in your life? What do you most need prayer for?

2. Some surveys suggest that we don't read our bibles regularly. Is this something you struggle with? Can you think of ways to support each other in your HG's, e.g. sharing reading plans, texting scriptures etc.

3. How can you "labour in love" when it comes to your relationship with others in the church and outside the church?

When the Thessalonians heard Paul's message they recognised that he was speaking divine truth and with that came a willingness to submit to its authority. In Ch 1 we see how the gospel message can transform a people and influence a city, no humanly contrived message can do this.

We can only stand firm and place our faith on the authority of the Word if we actually know what the Word is, to do so we must read it. Most of us probably have several bibles in our homes but surveys show that many of us who claim to value our bibles know little about what is in them and there is a difference between what some of us say about the bible being important and how often we open it up to read it. The Thessalonians recognised the origin and authority of Paul's message and because of this went on to proclaim it.

Their Faithful Work Paul prayed and thanked God for the work that was produced by their faith in God, - In verses 8-9 Paul points out evidence of this 3 times,

- *"The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia"*
- *"your faith in God has become known everywhere."*
- *"for they themselves report"*

The transforming work of the gospel was evident in the lives of these people and so news of them spread. Paul remembered before God their faith and gave thanks for the work their faith produced. This is not to say that an active faith and works are necessary for our salvation but they are testimony to it. Our faith is meant to make a difference in the world, we have a message that we need to share because we know that the only way a person can change is by a personal and direct encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Thessalonians could not keep quiet about this message because it transformed their lives v 8 *"and now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere."* As the message thundered out their influence grew, and people started to talk about this group of people, they were not just another church on just another street, they were impacting and changing the world they lived in.

Their Loving Deeds Paul prayed and thanked God for the Thessalonians love. In John 13:35 Jesus says, *"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."* They had a deep and genuine love for one another, Paul refers to a *"labour prompted by love"* and in the Greek he uses the word *"kopos"* alluding to labouring to the point of weariness, sweat or fatigue. In other words their love would go the distance even to the point of exhaustion, it is a love that knows no limits and it finds its ultimate source in the love of God. Their love for one another held the people together. When they heard that Jesus said in Matt 22 37-40 *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself."* - they believed it and they lived by it.

Love is vital to the Christian faith. We can't pray for others if we are indifferent to those we pray for and there is no use in praying for revival if its not the revival of people that we are praying for. If our hearts are not generous and open to seeing the very best in others arising out of God's blessing then we might as well save our breath, there is no point in praying.

It is when we grow in love for one another that we will grow in intercessory prayer. How well we love and serve God will be demonstrated by how well we love and serve his people, what is in their best interest must be uppermost in our minds and foremost in our prayers because the central core of the bible is that God is love and he desires the best for us. Love does not always come naturally to us, we may need to pray that God Himself will fill us with his compassion in order for us to see other people as He sees them, flawed but gifted and made in His image, his beloved children that He longs to embrace. It costs us nothing to be kind and to encourage another but can be invaluable in helping someone feel valued or perhaps when exploring a call or ways in which to serve the Lord .

Their Enduring Hope A vibrant church poses significant threats to Satan's strongholds, his aim is to steer people away from the gospel. If he can't render the church inoperative he will work to make it ineffective and if an attack from outside proves futile he will attack from inside. Our petty arguments within the church may start off small but can become huge divisive issues. Philosopher Pogo Possum said "*We have met the enemy and he is us!*" Times were tough for these young Christians, Satan was doing everything possible to stop them from spreading the gospel, he knew the threat that this church posed to his kingdom, yet Paul mentions in v 6 their "*severe suffering*" and v 3 "*their enduring hope.*"

Philip Yancey makes a statement about how some Christians view suffering, "*Christians would probably admit that pain was God's mistake he should have worked a little harder and invented a better way of coping with the worlds dangers.*" (*Where is God.*) By contrast Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that pain was not their enemy and he spoke from personal experience *2 Cor 12 9-10 "But he said to me " My grace is sufficient for you, my power is perfected in weakness..... for when I am weak then I am strong."*

When the persecution doesn't stop and things get worse, when healing doesn't happen and we face disappointment then like Paul we need to pray for strength to endure, for meaning in the suffering and for faith to believe in a good and loving God even when our mortal lives are at risk. They were able to persevere because of the "*enduring hope they had in Jesus,*" they had an unshakeable confidence in the Lord regardless of their circumstances. Barclay says, "*A man can endure anything as long as he has hope for then he is walking not into the night, but into the dawn.*" Satan knows our weaknesses and he will strike, so what do we do, give up, put off things we want to do? No we stand firm and press on with confidence in the living God, in the assurance of our salvation and the certainty we have of our future with Christ and when it is too difficult for us to pray ourselves because of the pain or the grief, we ask others around to pray for us.

Ray Comfort says that "*Jesus is not a something we put on to make our journey more comfortable, he is not a life enhancer he is a life rescuer.*" He makes our lives richer, better, more meaningful but far greater than these temporary benefits he gives us eternal benefits like forgiveness of sins and an eternal dwelling place with God, so let's pray that we will endure even when pain overcomes us and rest in our hope in Jesus.

A Model Church This church should never have survived. They had no seminars to go to, no courses to attend, no library of books to learn from, they had had the benefit of Paul and his friends for 3 weeks, before the full weight of Satan tried to extinguish the work of Christ, but God has a plan and even under the incessant pressure and intense

pain of persecution the Thessalonians faith remained strong. They would not deny Christ, they refused to turn away and bow to any false god. We can look back now and see how the faith of these early Christians in the face of such deadly attacks and suffering, glorifies Christ. Their suffering tells a story of their trust in their Saviour, of the hope they had in Him and the rewards they looked forward to through his death. Paul was rightly proud of these people. This church was a model church among the churches. There are three characteristic that made it one. 1) They were passionate about the Lord Jesus, 2) they were totally grounded in the divine truth of the gospel, they heard, it they received it and they got it!! 3) They also stayed close to the Word and the Helper.

Do you remember playing that game with a friend when you were a child where one of you went into a room to hide an object then the other child would come in and search for it. As the child looked for the object the other child would give hints as to whether they were near by saying they were - hot, cold, freezing and so on. The nearer the source of the object the hotter you got. The reason the Thessalonians were able to stand firm and grow in service and in love and the reason they brought so much joy to Paul resulting in him saying they were his "*pride and joy*" 2.20 - was because they stayed near to the Holy Spirit and the Word. They were hot, they were red hot, on fire for Christ. There was nothing mediocre about their faith or about their love or about their hope, they were an inspiration to Paul and the churches of Macedonia, (mediocrity inspires no one). God was ultimately the source behind every good thing that was happening among them. For many today church is a place simply to get married and attend funerals but God never intended it to be like this. He did not send his Son to die so that His church could become a building that people could attend at best once a week. His church is to be about forgiven people that Christ died for, who are washed clean by his blood "*without spot or wrinkle*" Eph 5 27 and who would "*shine like stars in the world*" Phil 2 15.

We may be saved by grace through faith alone but God never intended us to live alone, we are created for relationship, with God and with each other. When we walk together and are transparent with each other then we can rejoice in each others good times and hold each other up in the tough times. We need each other to pray that we will grow in faith and in love for each other, persevere and remain strong in the face of our sufferings and that we will be prepared and looking forward to the day when Christ returns. We who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour owe a debt of gratitude to these first Christians. This church stood on the authority of Scripture, shared their faith, loved one another, endured in the face of persecution and they stayed close to the Holy Spirit. They faced many challenges but unlike us today, a dying church was not one of them, they were world changers. May we follow Paul's example and never overlook the monumental importance of praying for others.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2019

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another and the blood
of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7