

Understanding Scripture Correctly In Preparation for Teaching It

Interpretation Principles Based on Scripture's Self-Testimony (2 Tim 3:16), Communication Paradigms (Rom. 8:31), and Self-Interpretation (Mk 7:19)

Principle	Examples or explanation
Top goal: understand the author's intended meaning	Scripture has 2 authors that always agree in each age. God and the human author never contradict: we hear God's voice in the human author. The Scriptures' meaning does not change across history, but stands above history and speaks to us today
Next goal: apply that meaning to us today	If the Scriptures are God's Word, then it's self-evident that we want to follow it. Moreover, there is no more trustworthy guide on which to build our daily lives (Mt. 7:24-27)
Basic interpretation principles built on Scripture's self-testimony, communication paradigms, and self-interpretation	
● Scripture is at the top of its own interpretive hierarchy. Ask: is some <i>other</i> authority governing my interpretation?	No <i>other</i> document, authority, viewpoint or interpretive process may invalidate any text. Officer, I didn't know it was illegal...Lord, I wasn't sure it meant what it clearly said... ^{**}
● Grammatical meaning always governs interpretation	If my interpretation nullifies clear grammatical meaning, my interpretation is incorrect
● Every word is exactly correct*, so let each one speak	Missing one word's meaning can mean missing the main point of the passage
● Only one interpretation, then one or more applications	If we're taught an abstract principle, let's apply it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit If we're given a concrete instruction, let's follow it in the strength of the Holy Spirit
● Scripture teaches logic, vocabulary, grammar, syntactical range, context!	For example, the "a fortiori" logical argument (if the hard thing is possible, how is the easy thing impossible?) appears countless times in contexts that explain its meaning
● Historical / cultural / literary context enrich and specify but don't correct actual grammatical meaning of the text	All context is itself built from clear grammatical meanings of other texts. Allowing context to alter clear grammatical meanings is self-contradictory, therefore self-defeating
For additional detailed principles, see the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics at https://www.alliancenet.org/the-chicago-statement-on-biblical-hermeneutics as of this date	
* Technically we should say "in the original," but the uncertainties in our present-day text are never enough in any practical sense to avoid the "ignorance of the law" disallowance. To adapt to our issue my own version of the famous quote from John Selden, ^{***} "Uncertainty about the Biblical text excuses no one from following it; not that there are no uncertainties in the text, but because it is an excuse that every reader disinclined to obey will plead, and no one can say how to refute it."	

Understanding 1 Thessalonians in preparation for teaching it

Some themes in the letter:

- Paul's and his team's deep love for the Thessalonians, clearly beyond his team's relationship with other churches
- The excellence of the Thessalonians, receiving Paul's exhortation to go even farther
 - Paul repeatedly says they don't need to write anything about a particular topic, the Thessalonians are well-informed about it already
 - Paul still gives a final exhortation to them to both live by what they know and encourage others to do so also (5:4-11)
- Paul's example of striving for excellence in his dealings with and affection for the Thessalonians
- The Thessalonian community's closeness, as evidenced by questions of whether their community would be together in heaven
- Paul is able to write these beloved and spiritually mature believers a rapid-fire, bullet-point set of spiritual instructions
 - The relationship and their spiritual maturity form a key context and enabler for how Paul puts those instructions
 - Paul calls out God's specific will in several places. Catalog these!

Background and context questions and needed preparation:

- Which missionary journey founded this church? Where was his team when he sent Timothy (3:1)? Who was with him at the time? Where are they when Timothy has returned and Paul writes this letter? Are they under persecution? (3:7) Who's on the team?
- How does Timothy's return and report fuel the content of this letter? Can we tease out anything reliable about his report?
- Establish how long from visit to letter to assess how much time the Thessalonians had to travel and spread the Gospel
- Review the Jewish opposition to Paul's ministry in preparation for teaching 2:14ff
- Review the timing of Paul's missionary travels to assess whether he held those planted churches loosely or tightly (2:17-20 questions)
- How long was it from Christ's resurrection to the date of this letter? How long had the world been waiting for Christ's return? (4:13-18)

Specific preparations for class sessions:

- Write session preparation notes and prepare presentation slides

Introduction and Background:

Suggested topics and content:

1. Read the entire book out loud? Takes about 11 minutes or so.

2. Provide Daniel's and my foundational perspectives regarding the Bible, its character and its role in our lives today

3. Provide our teaching methods

3.1. Ferrier: every word in the Scriptures is the word of God, so let it speak: ask ourselves questions to help us think together carefully about the specific things that are said, seek to understand them linguistically and also seek to understand the reasons they are said; look for local textual context within the book first, in order to reconstruct the author's meaning, then look to other Biblical passages as appropriate to help us understand the capital-A Author's intended meaning, add in historical context as we go, never correcting or changing the text's observed meanings, then apply the message of the studied text to our situations and to ourselves specifically.

4. Provide historical context for 1 Thessalonians

4.1. Quick review of Paul's four journeys, review second journey briefly and locate this letter in the second journey timeline

4.1.1. Give a quick justification for the dating of Paul's letter based on the Gallio inscription (show the stone!)

4.1.2. Show a map giving the route and the locations of the various cities

4.1.3. Review examples of Jewish opposition in various cities, read Acts 17 section giving Thessalonian events' context

4.2. Identify who was on Paul's team (apparently Silas and Timothy)

4.2.1. Brief background on both men, a sentence or two

5. Review the main themes of 1 Thessalonians

5.1. Paul's team's affection for the Thessalonians and theirs in return

5.2. The Thessalonians' excellence in their walk with Christ, and Paul's exhortation to them to excel still more

5.3. The influence and impact of ongoing cultural opposition on the Thessalonians and their relationship with Paul's team

5.4. First-century eschatology and end-times questions, for the benefit of all subsequent millennia!

5.5. Paul's confidence in the Thessalonians' walk leading to one detailed exhortation; beyond that, bullet-point instructions and direction

6. Talk about the process of application of this book. Some applications come from high-level themes in the book, which provide examples for us to follow (1 Cor. 10:11). Some applications come from concrete instructions in the text, which provide directions for us to obey (Luke 6:46-49). These, and everything in between, are opportunities for us to listen to God's Word as the Holy Spirit applies it to our specific situation today. Interpretation seeks to understand God's inerrant, infallible, authoritative content. Application seeks to understand God's specific intent for us today based on that content.

7. Have a conversation with the class: what questions do they have, how can we make the class as effective as possible for them, what's on their mind as they begin this class together with us, and so on.

Questions that persist for me as our start date approaches:

- Room setup? Covid protocols as usual, or different?
- Include the whiteboard? If so (and I hope we can) how to integrate it on Zoom? (Muted extra cameras?) If not, how to best use the online tool?
- Effective integration of Zoom participants into discussions?
- Transitions between teachers: we'll want to include a solid review of the previous week taught by the other person, no?
- Power Point presentations? Maps? If so, we will need a second projector, no?
- Who will be our ~~victim~~ guest lecturer for week 7? How might we use this week to begin to grow a younger person's teaching career?

Review: methods, general approach, discussion tools, Daniel's points and content from last week (to be added before week 1)

- **Method:** facilitated discussion each week to bring an accurate a) grasp of the text; b) understanding of the author's intended meaning, and c) concept of God's intended application for Christ's church and for each class participant

- **General approach:** ask closed questions (ones with a right/wrong answer) to help us clearly grasp what the text is saying, ask open questions to enable us all to understand and explore the author's intended meaning as well as consider and receive God's intended application of His Word to us

- **Practical discussion-building tools:** a) Silence (demonstrate it); b) Restatement; c) Deflection; d) In-class whiteboard discussion notes

Passage: 1:2-7

1. Paul says "all of you" in v. 2. When does he pray for the Thessalonians? How particularly do you think Paul would be able to pray for each one? (Keep this question in mind in the following questions.) [Whenever he prays; to be elucidated below]

2. What does Paul mean by praying "in the presence of our God and Father" in v. 3? Does all prayer happen this way--is it normal, or is it something special? [Open]

3. What about their election leads Paul to pray so intensely for them? It would almost seem as though he could ease up on the intensity a bit, since God was clearly directing their lives. [Their election clearly indicated God was strongly focused on them; Paul was following God's lead]

4. How does the experience Paul recounts in v. 5a relate to Paul's statement in v. 4? What do you think is the connection between these two ideas? [The events, experience and character of the Thessalonians' reception of the Gospel were a testimony of God's choice of them]

5. If the events surrounding the Thessalonians' conversion testified to God's elective intervention, what kinds of things might have been happening to demonstrate that? ["power:" possible miraculous events; "the Holy Spirit:" possible charismatic gifts including prophetic utterances; "full conviction:" a falling-off-a-cliff conversion event; an unexpectedly large number of people choosing to follow Christ; an immediate strength to disregard the clear cultural opposition that was demonstrated simultaneously with their conversions]

6. How does the second half of v. 7 relate to everything previous? [Up to that point, Paul is recounting many important (and positive) things he and his team know about the Thessalonians. At that point, he reminds them that they know positive things about him and his team as well.]

7. What process or experiences do you think led to this mutual discovery and understanding between Paul and the Thessalonians? What kinds of things might they have gone through to bring this about? [Open; affliction mentioned below in v. 6; history of Paul's work always included opposition and persecution; there was also Paul's spirit and personality that showed outstanding character, strength, wisdom, trust, meekness, etc.]

8. Paul immediately in v. 6 turns the subject back to the Thessalonians, and that's his topic throughout the rest of the section. So the whole section is about the Thessalonians...except for half of one verse. Does that seem odd to you, or is that just what Paul happened to want to say at that point? [Raise point to begin to note this kind of content, potentially leading to a sense of self-defense that should be considered later in the letter.]

9. Based on what we've read, what do you think about our first question? How particularly do you think Paul would be able to pray for each one?

10. From that picture of the possible experiences Paul and his team shared with the Thessalonians, as well as Paul's comments in v. 6, what might have motivated them so strongly to imitate Paul and his team, and to imitate the Lord? What do you think the relationship between those two imitations might have been? [Open; Paul's character as described above and in v. 5b; opposition; firm rooting in God's message and Word; practical reliance on God's providence and power in daily life; engagement in His mission and work on a routine basis]

11. Things sort of blow up in v. 7, don't they? It's the Paul-Harvey-rest-of-the-story moment. How does Paul know this? [Because he's traveling through all those areas or at least has connections!] Why has this happened, do you think? What concrete outcomes might have caused the story of the Thessalonians to travel far and wide? What was so amazingly special about the Thessalonians? [Not clear at this point to us, but well-known to Paul and the Thessalonians at this point in the letter! We will need to tease out the answers from the rest of the letter.]

12. Do the Thessalonians know all these things Paul has just recounted? Are they news or rhetorical statements? [They're clearly rhetorical as shown by lack of detail.] If they're rhetorical, why does Paul say them? What seems to be his objective in this entire passage? [Top level: ministry of encouragement. Underlayers: look carefully through the letter for Paul's more detailed objectives that get hinted at in this section.]

Application Questions:

- What leadership characteristics shown in Paul's letter's style, choice of content, and tone can be examples to us as we do our leadership tasks?
- How can we learn, focus on and elevate Paul's and the Thessalonians' relationship to move toward those characteristics within FBC?
- How can we church members constructively compare our attitudes as church members against the Thessalonians' approach and spirit? Does it take the difficulties and afflictions these folks experienced to build these results? If so, what do we do about that? If not, what do we do to help bring those results about?

Review: Paul reconnects with the Thessalonians, reminding them of their excellent heritage and receptivity to Christ, the supernatural events that brought them wholesale into existence as a church, and the positive results of their faith throughout the region. Paul does this while exhibiting deep affection for, confidence in, and prayerful attention to, the Thessalonians as a church and as individuals. We see outstanding examples of both leadership approaches and also church responsiveness to its leadership in the section.

Passage: 1: 8-10

1. In v. 7 Paul talked about the spreading news of the Thessalonians' example around their region. What does he add to that here in v. 8? [The very Word of the Lord has gone out from them.]
2. What do you think might be the specific content of this "word of the Lord" [Open; we'll uncover it in vv. 9-10 below]
3. Who is doing the conveying of this word of the Lord that has "sounded forth from you"? The Thessalonians or others? What makes you think this? [Probably not the Thessalonians, since the conveyance is occurring in direct connection with "the news of your faith" that "has gone out". Open.]
- 4 Why and to whom would this "news of your faith" be news? [It suggests that the Gospel is getting news coverage throughout the region, and that Christianity is becoming a well-known movement.]
5. What do you know from our review of Acts that might reveal factors causing Christianity to be newsworthy and a subject of widening public discussion? [Beyond the widening local opposition that arises in each place as Paul travels around, the Jewish community leadership was beginning to travel to other communities to spread opposition to Paul's message.]
6. In light of the increasing public knowledge of and news about Christianity, do you see any particular significance in the kind of "news" that has come out of the Thessalonians church's establishment and growth? [The "news" they represented could have provided a countermessage to the negative presentations from the itinerant Jewish leadership and other sources arising from previous cities Paul visited. This new news could allow the reputation of Christianity to progress from "reprehensible" to "controversial".]
7. If Paul is not describing the Thessalonians' direct missionary work, what is the interaction with new citizens in new cities that he is describing here? [Potentially instances where Paul in his ministry would recount the Thessalonians' response to promote favor for the Gospel in his new hearers, and his hearers say, "Hey, we already know all about that--we've heard the story."]
8. Based on v. 9, what saying is made unnecessary for Paul because of this spreading of the word of the Lord? What would Paul have said that he now doesn't have to say? [Paul might have planned to say, "Look, if you're wondering whether we're good guys, presenting the truth, let me tell you what the Thessalonians thought of us and how they took our message. More than that, let me tell you how they responded!" But this would be old news based on what Paul has described.]
9. What is the content of the news that "they" report to Paul in his travels? [The kind of reception the Thessalonians gave Paul, the way the Thessalonians turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and wait for the return of His Son Jesus, raised from the dead, who will rescue us from the wrath to come.]
10. Can you think of a one-word summary of the content of that report? [The Gospel!] So, revisiting our earlier question, what do you think might be the specific content of v. 8's "word of the Lord"? [The Gospel message!]
11. Do the Thessalonians know all these things Paul has just recounted? Are they news or rhetorical statements? [They're no doubt news to the Thessalonians, since they're clearly news to Paul that came from others to whom they were news! Now things have come full circle.] Why does Paul write this information to them? What seems to be his objective in this section? [Top level: an extension of the ministry of encouragement of the prior verses. Underlayers: look for Paul's more detailed objectives that get hinted at in this section. In particular, Christ's return.]

Application Questions:

- What was the state of Biblical Christianity in the opinion of the Roman culture when Paul was writing 1 Thessalonians? Controversial? Well-favored? Reprehensible? Something else? What part did the Thessalonian church appear to play in affecting that opinion? How did they do it? What characteristics enabled their influence and effectiveness based on this passage?
- What is the state of Biblical Christianity in the opinion of our culture today? Is it controversial? Well-favored? Reprehensible? What part do you think God wants us to play today in affecting that opinion? What characteristics do we need to enable us to have the influence and effectiveness that God intends, based on this passage?

Review: Paul informs the Thessalonians of the extensive and helpful news of their conversion and the formation of the church. This begins to provide a competitive propagating cultural theme that is supportive of Christianity as against the negative narratives which were spreading.

Passage: 2:1-4

1. Paul recounts something the Thessalonians already know in v. 1. He says that Paul's team's reception (εἰσοδόν, entrance or way in) with them was not in vain (κενῇ, empty, useless, devoid of truth). What purposes might Paul be thinking of? Remember, they are purposes the Thessalonians will immediately recognize and acknowledge. [Thought-provoking question--the obvious choices of a purpose of conveying the Gospel are ruled out by the verses below. Mark the answers discussed and revisit them after discussing the following verses]
2. In v. 2, Paul again recounts something he says the Thessalonians already know. What contrast is Paul drawing here? What kind of approach to the Thessalonians and reception from them in response might we expect after Paul's team's bad experience in Philippi? [We might expect them to be out of resources, weak, intimidated and meek in their presentation, which would probably not be very convincing to the Thessalonians.] What do we actually see in the team's approach? [Paul's team instead showed boldness in the face of much opposition.]
3. Does this help us understand better what Paul might mean when he says their entrance was not ineffective or empty? [Paul seems to be reminding the Thessalonians of his team's surprising energy, power and boldness in presenting the Gospel after such a terrible time in Philippi. It was not empty of energy and unable to produce results.]
4. What would the team's power and boldness in the face of local opposition not just in Philippi but now in Thessalonica communicate about the integrity of their message? How might serious opposition prevent actions based on intellectual error or dishonesty of motive? [They clearly were not in it for themselves, but they were preaching and teaching out of a genuine conviction of the truth of their message. If it were otherwise, they would have stopped or left to save their skin!]
5. Does this help us understand yet better still what Paul might mean when he says their reception by the Thessalonians was not empty of purpose? [Paul seems to be reminding the Thessalonians that they had visible, discernible, honest and fully-exhibited purpose and intent in their engagement with the Thessalonians. There was no empty statement of a false or deceptive purpose, but rather a fully-authenticated purpose that their actions validated.]
6. So we can already see in v. 2 that Paul's team's actions, their boldness in the face of opposition, demonstrated their integrity and honest motives. Paul then states this explicitly in v. 3. Do you notice any difference in the statement in v. 3 from the previous verses? Does any shift in language stand out to you? [Paul shifts from past tense to present tense, and speaks of their current integrity and honorable motives.] Why might Paul make this change, do you think? [Open; second possible lead regarding a need to defend his ministry]
7. What specific things does Paul deny as motivations in v. 3? How do they compare? How do they differ? [Open]
8. In v. 4, what comparisons does Paul make? How do the two compared ideas match up in each case? {Consider a table on the whiteboard}
9. One more time, do we gain more insight into Paul's v. 1 statement by these words? Does this section all begin to show a common theme? [From the very beginning of this section Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of his team's integrity, honest motivations, and truthful message content.]
10. Has Paul begun to build a theme in the letter defending their ministry in the current moment, do you think? [Open]

Application Questions:

- What are approaches and tactics we can use to demonstrate the integrity of our work for the Gospel? ["swearing to our own hurt" level of truthfulness; comprehensive application of the Bible's prescriptions for relationships with nonbelievers; transparency of objectives and consistency of action with those objectives; others?]
- What was the rock-bottom basis for Paul's ministry according to this section, and what was its effect on his ministry approach, strategy and tactics? How might we ensure that our ministries, both personal and church, have that same foundation and enjoy the same benefits?
- We saw Paul's point that boldness in the face of opposition is able to communicate integrity and honorable motivation. How might this apply to our work for the Gospel today? How do we realize this in our actions?

Review: Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his team's behaviors, actions and approaches that demonstrated clear honesty of motivation and adherence to God's calling and approval of their ministry, and restates their current commitment to that same honesty and integrity

Passage: 2:5-8

1. Once again, Paul references something that he says the Thessalonians already know. How many times has he said this as of this verse? [4 times: 1:5, 2:1, 2:2 and here in 2:5.]

2. What specifically does Paul put on his list of bad behaviors they didn't exhibit? [flattering speech, pretext for greed, seeking honor from the Thessalonians, seeking honor from anyone else.]

3. Let's think about flattering speech, and go back to 1:3-10. Was Paul saying a lot of things about the Thessalonians that might be considered unwise if he was concerned about accusations of flattery? Why don't the many things Paul said qualify as "flattering speech"? What characteristics of Paul's words and the situation they describe protect him from that charge? [They were clearly true facts that the Thessalonians already knew (there's that word again). So the Thessalonians' knowledge would confirm that Paul wasn't flattering them, but simply stating the (admittedly outstandingly positive) truth of the situation.]

4. What about the idea that the team's actions were done under a pretext for greed? How does Paul deal with that? {See Paul's later commendation of the Philippians for their gift to him while he was working in Thessalonica, Philippians 4:16.} [Here, Paul simply calls on what the Thessalonians knew about them: they knew what kind of men they were (1:5). He does, however, call on God Himself as witness to their innocence, having said that God has declared them approved to share the Gospel.]

5. What, then, about seeking honor from people, either the Thessalonians or those outside the church? How does Paul defend against that in the prior verses? [First, Paul has recounted the suffering and abuse (2:2) his team experienced in Philippi, and also points out the hostile environment the Thessalonians themselves experienced and which Paul and company went through with them (1:6) and in principle engendered through their preaching. This was the antithesis of seeking honor from people: it was rather sparking opposition.]

6. Paul is defending his team's motives, it's now clear. Do you see anything else in his earlier verses that might be a trump card to prove their honorableness to the Thessalonians by the Thessalonians' own actions? [1:6 the Thessalonians became imitators of Paul and the team! They not only approved of the team's approach, they adopted it for their own.]

7. What does the reality of Paul's apostolic authority mean for his argument? Why was that relevant? [There was no need to try to curry favor or honor: they had all the honor and authority they needed as Christ's apostles.]

8. Can you think of any instances in which Paul proved himself willing to exercise the authority of his position? [Elymas, Acts 13:9-12; Philippi with the city rulers, Acts 16:35-39, 1 Cor. 5:3-5 against a member committing immorality in the church] Do you see any similar outcomes or reasons for Paul's decision to act with authority in these cases? {Consider a whiteboard table here}

9. Can you think of other instances besides this one when Paul refrained from exercising his authority? [Acts 27:9-11 (cp. later 27:31-38); Paul's self-restraint in the face of a beating, Acts 16:22-24] Do you see any similar outcomes or reasons for Paul's restraint in these cases? {Consider a whiteboard table here}

10. What was Paul's approach instead of applying full apostolic authority? Give details. What did they do instead? [They were gentle with the Thessalonians; they mothered them(!), caring for their needs (what needs? Physical? Emotional? Spiritual?), they opened their hearts to them, sharing themselves with them, they let the Thessalonians in to their hopes and fears, they became vulnerable to them, they risked letting them become close.] {Definitely use a whiteboard table here}

11. Do you see any relationship between verses 7-8 and Paul's tone and approach in this letter so far? [Paul keeps calling on what the Thessalonians know about them: this is because they built a relationship of trust with them, and now that relationship is providing a foundation on which Paul can defend and keep their relationship and reputation with the Thessalonians.]

Application Questions:

- What characteristics of leadership excellence can we observe here? What obstacles to achieving this excellence exist at FBC? What steps can leaders take to overcome these? What steps can followers take to overcome these?
- What characteristics of followership excellence can we observe here? What obstacles to achieving this excellence exist at FBC? What steps can followers take to overcome these? What steps can leaders take to overcome these?

Review: After strong commendation of the Thessalonians, Paul may have begun an apparently-necessary defense of their ministry, building upon their shared experience and mutual affection with the Thessalonians. They particularly recount the depth of their relationships with the people in the church, and describe those relationships in detail as an alternative to one that merely exercises authority.

Passage: 2:9-12

1. What kinds of things would *force* Paul and his team to accept these difficult ministry circumstances? In contrast, what kinds of things would lead them to willingly choose these difficult ministry circumstances even when they weren't forced to do so? Which of these two was the case here? What does this tell you about Paul and the team, if anything? [Open]
2. How did the team's choice to support themselves provide the method ("it was by working...that we proclaimed") for them to preach the gospel to the Thessalonians? [Open]
3. We counted up the number of times Paul told the Thessalonians "you know", and reminded them of things. Verse 9 may represent a fifth instance, in saying "you recall". How many times at this point has Paul called on someone to be a witness to the truth of what he is saying? [Three times, once recently in 2:5 and now again twice in 2:10.] Why do you think Paul is beginning to use this courtroom allusion repeatedly? [He clearly is on the defense at this point, due to some kind of opposition or accusation of wrongdoing against him and his team.]
4. If Paul is on defense at this point, what do you see as the main basis on which he is making his defense of their actions on behalf of the Thessalonians? [Open; candidates: their close relationship with the Thessalonians; the Thessalonians' own knowledge and recollection of the facts of the matter, including the behavior and conduct of Paul and his team; his "oath," his calling on God to be their witness (which he has done twice, against only once calling on the Thessalonians to be witnesses, although he has reminded them five times now of what they know and recall.)]
5. As you look back over the content of the letter to this point, what are Paul's main assertions about their specific conduct toward the Thessalonians? What specific things are they emphatically reminding the Thessalonians that they did (if good) or did not do (if bad)? {Capture on whiteboard} [No error or deception in their message; no impurity; speech that was to please God; no flattering speech; no pretext for greed; no seeking improper honor from anyone; gentleness toward the Thessalonians; tender care, fond affection, delight to share the Gospel and also their lives; hard work day & night so as not to burden them; devout, upright, blameless behavior toward them; exhortation and encouragement as a father would treat his own children.]
6. How do you think Paul's perspective on the quality of their relationship with the Thessalonians factors in to this theme or argument that he has been making? What motivation might it provide for his assertions? [He and his team love these people. All their future ministry toward them is dependent on this relationship with them. And he wants them to continue to walk more and more uprightly and please God more and more.]
7. How do you think Paul's perspective on the Thessalonians' maturity and the quality of their walk with God factors in to this theme or argument he has been making? [Paul trusts the Thessalonians' understanding of the truth he taught them, and reminds them of both that shared understanding of what God has authoritatively revealed and also their shared experience defending and applying that common understanding of God's revelation.]
8. We have read Paul's *words* defending the honorableness of their approach. How were their *actions* an object lesson for the Thessalonians? {Whiteboard table} [First, he remembers their characteristics and prays for them individually as people whom he knows well. No instances of "Bless the Thessalonians, God." He has kept tabs on them as he has traveled, tracking the news about them across the region. He and the team came to them bruised and beaten from Philippi, but in spite of their condition still gave them the Gospel which they know has changed their lives. He and the team took a gentle approach with the Thessalonians, not the authoritative approach they had a right to take. They let the Thessalonians in to their hearts, and allowed themselves to be vulnerable in their relationship with them. And they took not a dime (drachma?) of support from the Thessalonians, but worked with them without charge the entire time they were there. And finally, Paul is writing them! He did not abandon them once the team left.]
9. Can you imagine at this point what might be going on to cause Paul to make such an extensive defense of himself and the team? Review Acts 17:1-9 to remind ourselves of the kind of intensity and opposition to their original work. [Open; the original opposition was native, local and very strong; they would still be living there and would not stop their opposition. Also, we saw that news was traveling fast and Christianity was becoming better-known; this would inform the local opposition and give them opportunities to twist facts and mount a "social media" cancel campaign, sts.]
10. Was Paul's overall approach to ministry to the Thessalonians vulnerable to this type of attack, strong against this type of attack, or neither?

Application Questions:

- How resilient is our leadership approach against controversy, opposition and conflict from outside the church? From within the church?
- How can leadership and congregation build a strong, deep, affectionate relationship to improve that resilience during times of conflict?
- Supportive, unified relationships must be built on a shared detailed understanding of authoritative truth. How do we find and/or keep that?

Review: Paul recounts his team's commitment to serve the Thessalonians as self-supporting ministers, taking nothing from the church, and maintaining a completely-honorable and upright behavior and ministry. His comments seem to point to serious opposition to their ministry after they have left to plant churches elsewhere in the area. Even in their defense, however, Paul and his team continue their open-hearted approach to the Thessalonians and exhort them to worthy living as they would their own family.

Passage: 2:13-16

1. In verse 13, Paul gratefully reminds the Thessalonians of a particular perspective and conviction they held. What perspective was this, exactly? [Closed, to bring emphasis on the sovereignty of God's Word as Paul delivered it. (Note that this is a secondary supporting passage for the absolute validity of Scripture as God's direct Word.) They received the word Paul and his team delivered as what it really was, God's Word itself]
2. Why do you think Paul reminded them of this at this point? [Open; may be helpful to raise one of last lesson's application points, that supportive, unified relationships must be built on a shared detailed understanding of authoritative truth.]
3. What do you think this actually means? How did the Thessalonians learn the Word of God? How did it come to them? [Through Paul's preaching and teaching!] So according to this passage, was Paul's preaching and teaching the very Word of God? [Yes!] In what sense was it God's Word? [All Paul's spoken words were conveying God's concrete, specifically-intended truth accurately to the Thessalonians as he preached and taught.]
4. Can you think of other similar channels by which God delivered His Word to His churches in the New Testament period? [Prophecy such as Agabus spoke, visions such as Peter had, the Spirit's specific verbal instructions to Philip, and more besides]
5. What was the general content of Paul's preaching and teaching from what we have discussed so far? [The Gospel, at least; there was no doubt other specific instruction and teaching that we can't discern from his letter.]
6. So if this was what God did in the first century, what did He do after the first century? Did He just let the churches figure things out on their own? [No, silly! He left us the New Testament Scriptures, which have the same validity and inerrancy, which are also God's Word in the same way.]
7. What claim does Paul make about the Word of God that the Thessalonians heard from the lips of Paul and his team? [That Word of God is at work in the Thessalonian believers!] So does Paul need to be there for the Thessalonian church to experience the working of God's Word that Paul and his team had preached to them? [No, clearly not.] So how, then, do you see that happening? How would God's Word be working in them in Paul's absence? [The Thessalonians were owning their own spiritual growth and knowledge of Christ.] What kinds of things do you think God's Word would be doing in their midst even as Paul is absent and writing them this letter? [When the Spirit of God established a church, He provided gifts for the proper functioning of the body (Eph. 4?), and those gifts would be operative in the Thessalonian church to further provide God's instructions and truth to them.] What would be the objectives of this work of God's Spirit? [Open; but see earlier commendations Paul makes, directing them to excellent living and fully-committed obedience to Christ.]
8. We have had a growing suspicion that Paul and his team were being maligned and undermined in some way in the hearing of the Thessalonians, and that has led Paul to mount a defense of their ministry and send it in this letter to the church. Do you see a change in tone between Paul's earlier defenses and his "on offense" statement here? Why might there be this change in Paul's tone? [Open; Paul was willing to defend himself for the sake of his ministry, but he kept to his gentle approach that already characterized their relationship. But when it came to the attacks on the church directly, he "got his dander up and gave 'em both barrels." Moreover, this attack reflected an effort of many opponents to block the presentation of the Gospel, and that hit at the heart of Paul's entire purpose and calling. Finally, Paul's connection makes it clear that this opposition began from the first day the Gospel was presented, and is not stopping even as Paul ministers. So he has no mercy when it comes to this severe evil.]
9. What is the core offense Paul feels personally in the actions of the opposition in vv. 14-16? What got him really angry about their efforts? [They were trying to shut down the delivery of the Gospel to the world, particularly to the Gentiles.] Why was this so offensive to him? [This was the worst kind of offense against God that they could commit.] How did Paul respond to this opposition throughout his ministry? [Persistent ministry, commitment to complete his church plants regardless of personal cost, strategic choices to stay or go, ongoing deep concern for all the churches they planted, long-term support by personal visit and letter, finally both a willingness to lose his life for Christ and to have God resurrect him if needed!]

Application Questions:

- Does our view of the Scriptures match Paul's assertions about the Word of God? Do we allow it the authority to speak to us with God's voice?
- Do we see God's Word working in us as Paul says it will? How do we live our daily lives so as to maximize the work that God's Word is able to do?
- How can FBC leadership help maintain, strengthen and develop that view of the Scriptures in us? How can they help keep us open to God's voice? How might we further strengthen our church community's foundation on the Scriptures throughout our interactions, ministries and fellowship?
- How can we cultivate a passion for God's work in the world, and for sharing the Gospel in particular, that reflects Paul's example more and more?

Review: Paul gave the Thessalonians a strong, detailed reminder that it was God's very Word that had come to them and continues to come to them even at that moment. He then went on the attack against the opponents of the Gospel from within their own city, condemning their attacks on the core purpose of God, namely to convey the Gospel to all people.

Passage: 2:17-3:5

1. What do you think would have caused Paul's necessary absence from the Thessalonians?
2. Why was Paul so interested in being with them again, do you think? Was it just the team's affection for them, or was there more reason beyond that?
3. Several times, Paul says, their plans and desires to return to the Thessalonians were thwarted by Satan. How do you think Paul detected Satan's hand in the hindrances? What were some of the previous indicators of Satan's opposition to their work during the missionary journey? What hints do we see in previous verses about the current and ongoing opposition happening in Thessalonica?
4. Were Satan's plans effective? How does Paul respond to that successful opposition from Satan himself? What were some of the increased risks Paul incurred by sending Timothy away off to Thessalonica? How had his team benefited from having a larger support base in previous ministry when facing severe opposition?
5. What do we discover was the burden on Paul's mind: what worried him about the Thessalonians' situation?
6. How, based on vv. 3b-4, do you think Timothy might encourage them? What would he say to them to make them feel less afraid and more courageous?
7. Do you learn anything about the unanimity of the team in verse 4? Why would this be?
8. Look back over Acts 17:1-15. How would you characterize the team's strategy and tactics in those verses? How well-planned was their ministry? How good was their preparation for the work? In the later situation Paul describes in these verses in 1 Thessalonians, was their situation better or worse? So how would you characterize the team's strategy and tactics in 2:17-3:5 in comparison to their initial visit to Thessalonica? Did Paul need God's detailed plan to minister?
9. What finally pushed Paul into a decision and into taking action? And what was behind this inability to abide such uncertainty about this group of new believers? So was this emotional decision-making? Put yourself into the picture when Paul is praying and talking with God about his decision to send Timothy back to Thessalonica. How and what might Paul have prayed?
10. Paul has been fighting against Satan's direct opposition. What kind of temptations do you think Paul had in mind when he worried about the Thessalonians' faith? How might Satan's temptations have obliterated all the work the team had accomplished among the Thessalonians?

Application Questions:

- Good strategic ministry planning vs. blundering boldly forward in God's direction: what are the pros and cons of each? When should we do each?
- Paul appears to have made a critical ministry decision based on emotions. Bad? Good? Wise? Unwise? When should we do the same, if ever?
- How can leaders incorporate the heart into their decisions? How can our congregation stay open to those heartfelt decisions in the midst of chaos?

Review: Paul recounted their laboring under Satan's opposition as they tried to shift their ministry plan to include a return to Thessalonica, and how they finally compromised with the conflicting demands of the ministry, putting those efforts under greater risk in order to reach the Thessalonians in person. It appears the decision was at least significantly emotion-driven: the team just could not stand the weight of their concerns and uncertainty any longer, and so made a decision to address them by splitting up and sending Timothy back to Thessalonica.

Passage: 3:6-10

1. What are the two major messages Timothy brings back from the Thessalonian church?
2. With Timothy's return report recounting the Thessalonians' continued reciprocal affection for Paul and the team, was there any need for Paul to go on defense as he seems to have done in this letter?
3. We've been able to tease out some of the circumstances the Thessalonians were probably facing. What do you imagine was responsible for their firm resistance to Satan's temptations, their strength against the kind of severe local opposition Paul says (2:14-16) was happening in this area at this time, and their successful stand in faith even when their main leadership, source of encouragement, and reservoir of God's Word to them had been absent for a significant period of time? Hint: go back and look at the things Paul praises them for.
4. Let's examine what the consequences might have been for the Thessalonian church if instead of getting these things right, they got them wrong.

Reference	Thessalonians' approach	Alternative flawed approach	Consequence for their faith
1:6: received the Gospel, emulated Paul and his team's life & ministry	- Wholehearted unreserved acceptance of the Gospel - Responded to affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit - Followed up by emulating both Paul and company and, what is more, the Lord Jesus Himself	- Skeptical reception for the Gospel (different than Bereans' approach) - Undervalue the Gospel, letting earthly affliction divert their focus from its merit, power and value - Continue to trust their own sense of direction for life	- Willingness to give weight to the option of saving themselves from affliction at the cost of their faith - Miss out on the power that comes from the joy of the Holy Spirit - Substitute an inadequate world-view for the rock of Christ
1:8 The word of the Lord sounded forth from the Thessalonians	- Embraced the Gospel so thoroughly that they caught everyone's attention and became regional breaking news	- Take a mild approach to the Gospel, made a half-hearted commitment, and nobody noticed	- No one would really notice if they abandoned that commitment
1:9-10 Left idols to serve the living God and wait for Jesus to return	- Became cultural contrarians and those who entirely abandon the world's values	- Maintain a syncretistic view under the hood, keeping their worldview options open and their eyes on the earthly circumstances	- They would always have an out, an exit into their old views that didn't cause so much difficulty
2:13 Took the teaching Paul gave them as God's Word	- Hit the bullseye in their evaluation of every word they heard from Paul and the team, correctly accepting it as God's Word to them	- Allow wiggle-room in their understanding of what they heard, weakening the reliability or trustworthiness of the message	- Reinterpretation can always escape difficult meanings - Reinterpretation can also generally produce whatever conclusion you need to reach

5. What is the main sense or emotion Paul reports in vv. 6-7?
6. Paul returns to his prayer ministry for the Thessalonians. At this point in our study, what motivations for prayer have you seen, and what has been the effect of those specific motivations?

Application Questions:

- What kinds of strong personal relationships will assist us to continue to improve our foundation as a church? How do we develop or improve these?
- How can we correct flawed responses to God's truth delivered to us as individuals and as a church? What approaches or practices might do this?
- What does FBC look like, inside and out, if we possess each of the four commended approaches with Thessalonian-level quality and commitment?
- What can we do as leaders and as a congregation to settle our prayers for others at FBC deeper into our hearts, approaching Paul's example?

Review: Paul recounted their exhilaration and deep comfort on hearing Timothy's report about the strong spiritual health of the Thessalonian church. It appears their ministry risk was completely justified. But all the good news about the church only drives Paul and the team to deeper prayer for their growth and maturity and deeper desire to be with them and minister to them.

Passage: 3:11-13

1. These three verses sound like a benediction at the end of a church service! Why do you think Paul makes this kind of statement here?
2. A benediction it may be, but it is most prominently a prayer for the Thessalonians. For what does Paul pray?
3. How do these things relate to what Paul has been saying previously? {Whiteboard table}
4. Paul asks that God bring them to the Thessalonians. What does this tell you about his approach to ministry? Is Paul still worried about the Thessalonians?
5. What and who was this first v. 11 request for? Was Paul asking it for himself, or for the Thessalonians, or for the Kingdom's ministry?
6. What previous themes do you see reflected again in v. 12?
7. Should God answer the prayer of Paul's in v. 12, what will be enabled in the Thessalonians' lives as a result? What does this mean? What would it be like? So are they there yet? How does Paul seem to think that this will come about? How would God answer Paul's prayer, do you think? How would He do this amazing thing? What's the connection between His causing them to overflow in love and His establishment of their hearts in blameless holiness?
8. When will this holy life be realized in the Thessalonians' lives? So what's the timing: is this a sudden event at their homegoing, or is it a gradual progress toward that perfection, or is it something else? Consider Paul's comments elsewhere about what we will be like at the moment when we see Him. Again, a reference to being in the very presence of God. How is this similar to and different from previous references to this in the letter?

Application Questions:

- Did Paul ask the Thessalonians what he should pray for them, or did he already know what they needed? How might we develop this insight?
- Are we growing in love for others and as a result experiencing deeper, stronger, more blameless and holy hearts? If not, what can we do about it?
- How might this objective be transferred from the pages of 1 Thessalonians into the specific ministries, processes and interactions within FBC?

Understanding and Teaching 1 Thessalonians • Week 7 • Guest Speaker

(We used this week as a catchup week for 3:11-13.)

Review: Paul and the team pray for God's direction and opening of a way to return to the Thessalonians, for their overflowing and increasing love for each other and all people, and for a resulting holiness in this life and in the presence of God when Jesus returns

Passage: 4:1-8

1. In 4:1-2, do you hear echoes of previous ideas and themes that Paul has struck so far? [You've heard this from us, you know what instructions we gave <=> you know, you recall; you do these things <=> you received our teaching, you imitated us, you became an example]
2. In his absence, with none of the team there to support them, Paul in 4:1 is asking the Thessalonians to redouble their spiritual growth. What might make him think that he could ask that of them?
3. In vv. 2-4, Paul talks about something the Thessalonians know, something of highest importance that they need to know, and something they need to not fail to learn if they don't know it. What are these things? The prior instructions they gave the Thessalonians; that their abstinence from sexual immorality is God's will for them; that each individual know how to live bodily in sanctification and honor, and if someone does not know how to do this, that person is to learn how to do this without fail.]
4. In v. 3, Paul is presenting a high-level abstract category of behavior that is nonetheless a clear command of a practice (abstention is a practice!). What behaviors fit into this category? How did the Thessalonians know what to do and not do? How do we know today?
5. "Vessel" is almost always used in the Scriptures as a term for one's physical body: σκεῦος: vessel, implement, utensil, equipment, common Gk metaphor for human body. See **mainly** Mt 12:29, Lk 17:31, Jn 19:29, **Ac 9:15**, Ac 27:17, **Ro 9:21-23**, 2Co 4:7, **2 Ti 2:20-21**, **1 Pe 3:7**.
6. Paul commands them in v. 4 to know, not think, not have some idea, not be more or less aware, but know. Unlike so many other things Paul has said, this is apparently something he's not sure the Thessalonians do know. What might this comprehend in terms of the variety of situations they might encounter, the clashes the culture might bring to bear on their behavior and choices, the inborn temptations to follow bodily desires, and other factors?
7. In v. 6, where Paul warns against violating others' rights, what do you think Paul means concretely here? There is the possibility, based on the terms Paul uses, that this is a "civil rights" or legal context. If this is a legal or civic issue, what might it tell us about the relationship of the Christian to the culture and legal system of the nation in which he or she lives?
8. Where does Paul's verse 6 warning and invocation of the Lord as avenger of wrongdoing fit in the picture of his ministry to the Thessalonians? Is it consistent with the warmth and encouragement he has exhibited earlier? If so, how does his strong warning fit in with that earlier content?

Application Questions:

- Paul can write verses 1-8 due to the character of the Thessalonian church and its members, but as with the Scriptures as a whole, these words are meant by the Holy Spirit to instruct and guide us today as well. Are there aspects of our personal or church character that make any of Paul's exhortations, especially vv. 4-5, rejectable to us, resulting in participation in sinful passions? If so, how do we repentantly address the character and consequences of that rejection that Paul states in verse 8? What steps do we take?
- What does the Holy Spirit have to do with this situation, again from v. 8? How does He involve Himself in our situation?
- Paul describes the Lord as the One Who stands by in the office of avenger. What should we expect from Him in the event of our participation in these types of sin against others?

Review: Paul builds on the church's current strengths to urge a daily, moment-by-moment focus on pleasing God. He expresses God's specific will for them, namely sexual holiness, proper relationships with others and respect for civil and personal rights, recognition of God's avenging character, and taking His commands seriously.

Passage: 4:9-12

1. Paul in v. 9 says that he doesn't need to put any content in his letter about how the Thessalonians should love each other: he says God already teaches them how to do that. How might God be doing such instructing?
2. How does God instruct you and me in general?
3. What might it say about the Thessalonians that they were able to perceive, accept and follow this communication channel and its instruction from God?
4. Paul calls the Thessalonians to "excel still more" in this letter. How might the Thessalonians' receptivity to God's direct teaching reflect such excellence, going beyond the normal expectations for believers or churches?
5. What do you think would be the measure of their excellence here? Excellence above what current achievement, standard or behavior?
6. How might we understand Paul's statement that the Thessalonians practice love for Christians in the whole of Macedonia? How might this be happening?
7. In vv. 10b-11, Paul urges them farther into excellence, and also urges them to a specific ambition. How could that ambition reflect an exceptional level of excellence? In what would they be excelling? How would that excellence produce fruit or outcomes by which the true character of that excellence could be seen?
8. In the earlier parts of the letter, Paul has focused heavily on the Thessalonians' excellence in listening to and obeying God's word, in loving others within the body of Christ locally and regionally, and on God-honoring sexual ethics, which he needed to re-emphasize. How do these exhortations here fit in with the Thessalonians' evident character and motivation? How do they enhance their ministries within and without the fellowship?

Application Questions:

- How does God personally instruct us as followers of Jesus today?
- How well-developed are our individual abilities to perceive, accept and follow that personal instruction from God to us? If this is not up to our best abilities, how do we reach that level of listening and obedience?
- Is there an analog or comparable type of geographic extension of our love for others today that compares to Paul's description of the Thessalonians?
- What role do the exhortations and behaviors of vv. 11-12 play in our ministry to our neighbors and fellow community members?

Review: Listening to God and obeying His teaching is a key mark of Christ in our lives, Paul indicates; he commends and further instructs the Thessalonians in their practical love of believers and others within and without their church and even their city. He also urges them to build on that love through proper civic life and economic responsibility.

Passage: 4:13-18

1. In v. 13, what kinds of changes in focus does Paul introduce here compared to his past tone and content? How does Paul soften this transition?
2. What priority do you think Paul places on this discussion relative to the other subjects he has talked through in his letter? What priority do you think it should have today compared to back then, from your personal perspective?
3. Why do you think in v. 14 Paul makes a logical argument here ("For if we believe that ... [then] so also ...") rather than sympathizing with and helping the Thessalonians with their feelings of grief directly? What might this tell you about Paul's approach to deeply hurtful aspects of life in our world?
4. Do you think the Thessalonians needed to be told about our individual resurrection--could it have been new information to them? How might Paul's introduction in v. 13 illuminate this question? Would the Thessalonians be wondering whether they would ever see friends and loved ones again once they had died?
5. From where did the teaching content of vv. 14 come?
6. In v. 16, what specific Thessalonian question or questions might Paul be addressing with this information?
7. Everything in v. 16 is going to happen at almost the same time. Do you also perceive some causal relationships among the events in v. 16?
8. What is Paul's answer in v. 17 to the question about whether loved ones who had died were gone from the Thessalonians' lives forever? Was it that they would all be reunited in heaven, but the Thessalonians still alive would have to wait until then?

Application Questions:

- How does our level of focus on Christ's return compare with that of the Thessalonians? If it is different, why do you think that is the case?
- We are in an unprecedented time of cultural upheaval at this moment in our country. How might this interchange between Paul and the Thessalonians impact our thinking about the current issues that we face? What about it might be useful to produce what Paul recommends in v. 18? What about it might be useful to drive us to Kingdom work on earth in the midst of the difficulty?
- How should you view your own death in light of this passage? The death of others whom you love?

Review: Paul helps the Thessalonians with the problem of dealing with death from God's perspective within their culture. He pithily delivers God's plan for those brothers and sisters who have preceded the Thessalonians in death. More than that, he outlines Christ's re-entry into our world, and the outstanding consequences for our reunion with those who have passed away before us.

Passage: 5:1-11

1. Why might the Thessalonians not need to have Paul write anything to them about "the periods (general timeframes) and times (specific times)"?
2. Based on Paul's words, how does Christ plan to deal with our world's evil when He returns? What do you think about that?
3. What do you see Paul saying about the relationship between a sense of peace and safety and the risk of unpreparedness for Christ's return? What is his point, do you think?
4. In vv. 4-5, Paul once again seems to point out a highly-commendable spiritual characteristic of the Thessalonians as he has done several times before. In this case is he speaking descriptively, describing how they are, or prescriptively, describing how they should be? What makes you think that?
5. To answer the question above: Paul is speaking descriptively, specifically telling the Thessalonians that Christ's return will not take them by surprise. Why can he say this about them, do you think? What prevents us from being spiritually blind as believers?
6. In our culture today, are there rock-bottom beliefs that our culture relies on even when our culture is anxious over our circumstances? What examples come to mind?
7. What exactly do you think Paul means by "darkness" and "sons of light and sons of day"?
8. In vv. 8-11, Paul paints this verbal picture, and tells the Thessalonians, "That's you!" He then urges them to act in accordance with their character. It's the classic, "Be, then do!" that is a key idea at the heart of the Bible's teaching about those who have received Christ. What characteristics can we observe in ourselves along the lines of Paul's description, since we are redeemed followers of Christ?
9. Having observed those characteristics in ourselves, how should we choose to act, what habits and regular behaviors should we be practicing, and what kinds of behaviors should we avoid per Paul's exhortation?
10. Paul specifically exhorts the Thessalonians to be sure not to fall asleep. What do you think that means for us today, and how do we do that? What environments or circumstances might work to impair our spiritual sensitivity and alertness?
11. What do the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of salvation have to do with it, do you think?
12. Paul wrote this letter about 2000 years ago. Does this reduce the weight of his points in these verses for us today, or do they still carry the same weight? Why do you think so?
13. How might Paul's exhortation (or command?) in v. 11 represent excellence, going beyond the normal expectations they have of themselves as a church and as believers? What is he asking them to do beyond what they would do naturally and without any special effort?

Application Questions:

- Do you think about Christ's return frequently? If so, what responses and reactions does that create in you? If not, what might be the reason?
- Do you feel like Christ's return would take you by surprise? If so, what might you do to help avoid that condition?
- What "be" characteristics of a redeemed follower of Christ might you refocus on, to help motivate and strengthen your "do" walk with Christ?
- How might your next personal prayer conversation with Christ incorporate "excellent" listening to learn how He would now like you to walk?

Review: Paul has added new information on Christ's return to the teaching the team already provided the Thessalonians in person. He exhorts them to excel still more in their practice of walking soberly in the Light, and encourages them to wear their spiritual armor as they wait for their salvation and final entrance into the presence of Christ.

Passage: 5:12-28

1. Having recounted and built on the excellence of the Thessalonians' character and community throughout the letter up to this point, and having strongly encouraged them over and over about their spiritual maturity, Paul in vv. 12-22 now relies on that excellent maturity to deliver a string of short, pithy commands and exhortations, all of which work together to build a constructive, responsive church culture. These commands and exhortations need little exposition, so we can jump right to application.

5:12 Do we recognize (both as knowing about them, and as publicly praising them) those who lead and instruct us, laboring diligently? What are some of their names? What is some of the outstanding work they have done?

5:13 Do we regard them very highly in love because of their work? How?

5:14a Do we admonish the unruly? How?

5:14b Do we encourage the fainthearted? How?

5:14c Do we help the weak? How?

5:14d Do we show patience with everyone? When is the last time you felt impatience toward someone at FBC? Did you correct that attitude?

5:15a Do we make sure that no one ever repays evil for evil, but that everyone always seeks what is good for others? How?

5:15b Do we always in addition seek what is good for all people? How?

5:16 Do we follow Paul's command/exhortation to rejoice always? What can we learn from his bold charge to us to do that? Is he right that we can?

5:17 Do we follow Paul's command/exhortation to pray without ceasing? If he thinks we can rejoice always, he must think we can do this too, no?

5:18 Do we follow Paul's command/exhortation to give thanks in everything? The man has no shame: he thinks we can do this too. Do we?

5:19 Do we quench the Spirit? Can you point to a time when you have experienced the work of the Spirit that you could quench? How did you do?

5:20 Do we listen and consider the Word of God that comes to us from others, or do we miss that communication unintentionally or intentionally?

5:21-22 Do we examine everything said that claims to be truth, then grip tightly what is really true and stay away from what is evil? How?

2. In v. 23, based on what we know of their relationship from this letter, how important do you think it was to Paul that God do this for the Thessalonians? How important to our leadership is it to see God do this for us, and how will they help bring this about?

3. In v. 23, based on what we know of their relationship with Paul from this letter, how important do you think it would be to the Thessalonians that God do this for them? How important is this for us as a congregation to have God do this in each of us, and how will we help bring this about in cooperation with our leadership?

4. Per v. 25, do we all pray for our leaders regularly? They are surely asking us as much as Paul asked the Thessalonians.

5. Specific method aside, per v. 26, do we acknowledge and demonstrate the relationship each one of us has with every other FBC person we meet, whether member, visitor, or "status unknown" by greeting them in a way that conveys an appropriate, purposeful, upright affection for them?

6. Per v. 27, do we accept the oath-level responsibility to positively communicate to everyone at FBC without exception what they need to know, especially those things that convey God's work and His Word?

7. Are we all about enabling and communicating the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to everyone we know at FBC, and doing everything we can to prevent anyone from stumbling through any grace-devaluing approach we might take toward them?

None of us is yet the person Christ intends us to be. But how we respond to that reality is important. Are we discouraged, and not really focused on that process anymore? Are we excited about the prospects of what God is doing in and through us at this point? Are we relaxed and at ease, leaving the process up to God and perhaps missing our part in the work? Are we committed to hear and respond to the Holy Spirit's guidance, ready to make all the progress we can by His power? Wherever we are in our response, we can spend time in prayer, sit in God's lap, and connect with Him to reinvigorate our reliance on, our trust in, and our walk with Him. Here are possible applications from His Word to us in 1 Thessalonians to consider.

Letter theme, example, encouragement, exhortation or command	Example or relevant passage	Possible application questions to consider
Paul's leadership's love for the Thessalonian congregation	1:2-7,3:1-5,3:11-13	(Leaders) How can you evaluate your leadership against Paul's example, and improve your ability to lead with love?
Thessalonian congregation's love for Paul's leadership team	1:2-7,3:6-10	How can you love your leaders in practical ways on an ongoing basis, and let them know in this way that they are making a difference in your life?
Thessalonians' reception of and obedience to God's Word	1:2-7,2:13-16	Do you take God's Word with the high seriousness it deserves, keeping it at the top of your priorities, and understanding and obeying it?
Thessalonians' propagation of the Gospel to an oppositional culture	1:8-10	Are you always alert to ways to bring the Gospel into your interactions with others? Do you work to find ways to speak boldly yet kindly about Christ?
Excellent leadership, even during uncertainty about the right path	2:1-12,3:1-5	(Leaders) Do you have a well-proven leadership model for the sake of Christ's church, one that includes attention to your example?
Live holy lives, govern your passions, never violate others' rights in this area	4:1-8	Do you repent of thoughts, attitudes, words and actions that displease Christ? Do you repair relationships with others that you have damaged?
Show practical love to Christ's people by quiet, responsible, hard-working living	4:9-12	Do you recognize Christ as the owner of everything and you as the steward of the things He has permitted you to have? Do you steward them for Him?
Don't worry about those who have passed away: they'll return with Christ!	4:13-18	Do you cultivate a joyful spirit and look forward to meeting those who have gone before us when we join them in heaven?
Live soberly each moment with a conscious awareness of Christ's soon return	5:1-11	Do you live in light of Christ's return? Does that reality impact your planning, your thinking, your relationships and your investments?
Have high regard for your leaders	5:12-13	Do you speak ill of your leaders to others?
Live in peace with each other	5:13	Do you work to identify and remove disunity based on dislike of others?
Admonish the unruly	5:14	Do you help exhort others when Christ would have you do so?
Encourage the fainthearted	5:14	Do you show mercy to those with inordinate fears, encouraging them?
Help the weak	5:14	Do you help build special protections around those who need strength?
Be patient with everyone	5:14	Do you keep irritations to yourself and respond as Christ would have you?
Never repay evil, seek the good of all	5:15	Do you make sure never to avenge a wrong against you, but instead do good to the person who has committed that wrong against you?
Rejoice always	5:16	Do you go past "aspirational" and push hard to reach & keep this attitude?
Pray unceasingly	5:17	Do you go past "aspirational" and call on God more and more over time?
Give thanks in everything	5:18	Do you go past "aspirational," cultivating a thankful spirit in each moment?
Don't quench the Spirit	5:19	Do you listen carefully and obey when the Spirit speaks through Scripture, preaching, conscience or other ways?
Don't despise prophecy	5:20	Do you elevate your attentiveness and focus when Scripture is preached?
Examine everything, hold to the good, abstain from every form of evil	5:21	Do you think Biblically about all that the culture and the people around you present as good or true ideas or proposals, and reject what is evil or false?
Pray for your leaders	5:25	Do you go past "aspirational" and pray regularly for all your leaders?
Greet each other warmly	5:26	Do you convey affection for all and openhearted interest in everyone?
Never fail to communicate God's Word clearly within the fellowship	5:27	Do you support and help communicate important truths from God's Word to your fellowship, encouraging and building up the body to help it grow?

Conclusion: The "Thessalonian Way," patterning our individual and church life after God's Word, specifically Paul's first Thessalonian letter. These ideas are not another legalistic list of do's and don'ts. They are the picture the Holy Spirit has painted for us, through this part of Scripture, of the church life and the individual walks with Christ that He is offering to bring about if we submit to His Word.

The Thessalonian Way

Theme, example, exhortation or command	Example or relevant passage
We leaders lead by first loving the congregation	1:2-7,3:1-5,3:11-13
We followers follow by first loving our leaders	1:2-7,3:6-10
We all fully receive and obey God's Word	1:2-7,2:13-16
We unashamedly bring the Gospel to our culture	1:8-10
We leaders lead from both the head and the heart	2:1-12,3:1-5
We all submit our passions to God, respecting others	4:1-8
We love others by living quiet, responsible, hard-working lives	4:9-12
We cultivate an attitude of anticipation of reunion with fellow-believers in heaven	4:13-18
We live soberly under a conscious awareness of Christ's soon return	5:1-11
We cultivate a high regard for our leaders	5:12-13
We live in peace with each other	5:13
We admonish the unruly	5:14
We encourage the fainthearted	5:14
We help the weak	5:14
We are patient with everyone	5:14
We never repay evil for evil, but instead seek the good of all people	5:15
We rejoice always	5:16
We pray unceasingly	5:17
We give thanks in everything	5:18
We don't quench the Spirit	5:19
We don't despise prophecy	5:20
We examine everything carefully, we hold to the good, and we abstain from every form of evil	5:21
We pray for our leaders	5:25
We greet each other warmly	5:26
We never fail to communicate God's Word clearly within the fellowship	5:27

How can we allow this part of God's Word to affect our lives and relationships with each other? How can we respond to this letter, this part of God's Word, in a way that will move us closer to being a church that thoroughly pleases Christ? One of the first ways would be to ask each other for help. We in the congregation can ask our leaders how we can support and help them in ways that show we love them. Our leaders can ask the congregation how they can better show practical love for us as they lead. Importantly, we can all refocus our attention, our priorities, and our values on the clear presentation of God's will for FBC that 1 Thessalonians--and all of Scripture--presents. That is an action that we can all pursue as a team: it's an action team made up of the entire church.

Daniel and Steve hope to bring a "dry run" of this type of interaction and mutual help during our wrapup class this week. We will work to facilitate a discussion in which leaders and attendees can ask questions of each other in light of these points God's Word makes. By God's grace, we look forward to building bridges of good communication and improved understanding of others' perspectives, and achieve some "breaking the crust" that happens when too much time has passed without Scripture-strengthened investment in relationships within the church.

1. As you reflect on 1 Thessalonians, how has the Lord drawn you to love your brothers and sisters more?
2. What should you do to deepen our prayer life with or for our church leaders?
3. How can our Elders draw you into a warmer relationship?
4. What should FBC, "do all the more"? "Encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, admonish the unruly ..."
5. What past hurts or confusion can we strive to avoid as we step into the future together?
6. Have you displeased the Lord by failing to fully engage in FBC's transition this past year?
What attitudes and behaviors should you change going forward?
7. When have you adopted a "whatever" attitude of indifference concerning important topics that you should more fully process or engage with?
8. What are three tangible ways you can live out the Gospel with your neighbors and community?