

TERM 3

LEADER'S BOOK

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About Growth Groups

Do you remember the Campbelltown Anglican Churches' Vision Statement?

We want to be ...

***"a growing Christian community
devoted to
maturing in Jesus for the glory of God."***

We don't need to grow as a Christian alone. The reality is that doing it alone is both hard and slow. God has given us 'everything we need for life and for godliness.' (2 Peter 1:3) One of those things is our church community. Growth Groups provide an excellent opportunity to help each other to live out grace and apply our knowledge of Jesus. We want to be a community devoted to knowing Jesus and trusting him.

What that looks like in Growth Groups

Magnification - We are made to glorify God. As we read the bible together, allow yourself to be amazed by God. Share with one another what you have learned about the greatness of God. And let your prayers celebrate his goodness, his power and his care.

Membership - We are designed to love one another. So, love one another. Get to know one another and listen out for when someone needs encouragement or help. Do your bit to make your group a family in Christ. Also, who else can you invite from your congregation to join your group?

Maturity - Our goal is to grow in Christ-likeness. Reading the bible together is not the ends of our meetings. The plan is to mature. Be ready to be rebuked and corrected from the Scriptures as well as being taught and encouraged. Pray for one another's maturity and celebrate with each other when you see God growing people up.

Ministry - God has saved us to serve. Work out how you can help your Growth Group leader to create a great group experience. Look

out for what talents others have in the group and encourage them to use their gifts for the group and for the church. Can your group do something together in serving the church community?

Mission - God's mission is our mission. Pray together about your opportunities and efforts to speak God's word into your world. Pray for the church's mission endeavours and pray for missionaries overseas together. Could your group do something together to reach the community in which you live?

Each group is different

One way to help Growth Group work for everyone is to make sure that we are all on the same page. This can be achieved by listening to each other's expectations, discussing them and agreeing to a set of expectations as a group. It is helpful to do this once or twice each year as your group changes and morphs over time.

What are your expectations of *this* group? Reflect on the following three questions and then spend some time listening to one another's ideas. What expectations can you come up with as a group?

1. From the leaders in this group I expect...

Some things to consider in your discussion together might include:

2. From the others in this group I expect...

*start and finish times;
preparation;
discussion; prayer;
growth/future; if you
can't make it;
confidentiality; contact
method and details*

3. From myself in this group I expect...



People in my group

[illegible]

Study 1 - Proverbs: Wise Spending

What shall we do with money?

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Timothy 6:10

Context

The book of Proverbs has a story to tell. Through parables and sayings we have heard that wisdom is good and the only way to truly live, while folly is bad and leads to destruction. Chapters 1 to 9 painted a worldview where wisdom from God is to be dearly sort after, and that wickedness and foolishness must be spotted and rejected. Proverbs 3:5-6 is famous for good reason:

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge him,
And he will make straight your paths.*

In this study and the next, we will look at what the book of Proverbs says about a particular issue. It will be good to remember that we are to trust God and not put our own instincts in charge. We looked at the topic of wealth in our previous study book. That study focused on how to think about money, how to earn it and where our hearts ought to be. This week we will focus on how we spend our money.

Discuss

How do you manage the spending and saving of money?

Read, Mark, Learn

- 1. Read the following sections from Proverbs, discuss what it says and rewrite it as a catchy slogan.**

Proverbs 3:9-10

*Honor the Lord with your wealth
and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.*

Discuss its meaning

To honour the Lord with the firstfruits is to give it away! Numbers 28:26 says concisely that the firstfruits of the harvest are to be offered to the LORD in thanksgiving (see also Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 2:12; Deuteronomy 18:4). It is accompanied with sacrifices and is part of the Levitical law but it communicates that thanksgiving is to be given first for the land producing crop. Although the Levitical law has lost its primary power this side of the cross, it is still important for giving wisdom. Notice that giving is a primary ingredient for ongoing profit (Proverbs 3:10).

Make it a slogan

Always give thanks to God.

Proverbs 22:7

*The rich rule over the poor,
and the borrower is slave to the lender.*

Discuss its meaning

Taken separately, these two statements are just true on their own merit: the rich have the power to pay for poorer people to do stuff and if you owe someone money, then you are indebted to them until it is paid off and therefore not independent. But taken together, it is better to be able to independently paying for things than to need rich people's 'help'. Better to buy a \$4K car with your own money than to drive a \$25K car you needed help to pay for.

Make it a slogan

It is wise to avoid debt.

Proverbs 19:17

*Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,
and he will reward them for what they have
done.*

Discuss its meaning

Contrast this with Proverbs 22:7 and we have wisdom for the rich is to see lending money as a positive thing. When we have the power and opportunity to help someone else then we do this. The Lord uses the generosity of people to do his work. Our money ought to be in service to the Lord. Notice that when money is lent to the poor, the Proverb describes the payback as coming from the Lord. It suggests that we ought to give without expecting to see that money returned from the poor person. See Proverbs 14:31.

Make it a slogan

See your money as a tool for God's work. Be generous rather than an investor at people's expense.

Proverbs 28:22

*The stingy are eager to get rich
and are unaware that poverty awaits them.*

Discuss its meaning

Stingy would be the opposite of generous. Our instinct is to keep everything in order to have as much as possible but God's wisdom says that generosity will get you far. What we have will be taken from us whether we like it or not and will we have treasure in heaven? The stingy are not willing to give to the poor because that equates to having less for themselves. But a heart that is for God will release its grip on money.

Make it a slogan

Release your grip on money and trust God for your future.

Proverbs 21:17

*Whoever loves pleasure will become poor;
whoever loves wine and olive oil will never be
rich.*

Discuss its meaning

This proverb requires context. The love of pleasure is a euphemism for loving the things of this world rather than simply wanting to be happy. Loving wine and olive oil is to indulge in luxury. Other proverbs speak of the downward spiral of those who love wine (23:20-21). Compare this proverb with the one that sees the value of money (13:11) and the one that says put in a day's work (12:11).

Make it a slogan

An expensive life is expensive. Live within your means and make you means meaningful.

Proverbs 13:22

*A good person leaves an inheritance for their children's children,
but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous.*

Discuss its meaning

Take the first statement first. It is good and wise to look after your children. There is a godly responsibility for a person to think beyond themselves and take care of their family. 1 Timothy 5:8 is strong on this subject. The lesson is not that the grandchildren ought to expect a handout since this is a lesson for the parents. It is for the adult to show responsibility. The second statement, in its context, teaches that wealth stored up in a stingy manner and kept for self will be passed on to someone eventually. The inheritance will not go to who you may have wanted it to go but to those whom God will bless. It seems that Solomon is using hyperbole to show what is good and what is bad and the overall lesson here is that money kept beyond your lifetime ought only happen for the direct and explicit purpose of handing to those for whom you are responsible.

Make it a slogan

Store money for other's sake, not for your own.

Proverbs 13:11

*Dishonest money dwindles away,
but whoever gathers money little by little
makes it grow.*

Discuss its meaning

Money that comes quickly and without effort is given little value and is lost with unwise spending. Money that is collected over time with patience and diligence is also money that is not spent rapidly. The time taken to grow the money teaches the earner that money shouldn't be thrown away. Refer to the Proverb on wine and olive oil (Proverbs 21:17).

Make it a slogan

Money ought to have meaning. Earned properly and spent respectfully.

- 2. Look at Colossians 3:5 and discuss what is being said there about spending. What is the danger and what is the solution?**

Greed is idolatry. We are asked to put greed to death just as we would sexual immorality and other evil desires. A diagnosis of where we stand before God can be in how we use our money.

Meaning

Money is a passing tool for this life. It is poor form and ungodly to spend it only on yourself, store for abundance, or throw it away on indulgent things. It is rich in wisdom to spend it with thankfulness to God, first to show thanks to God, second on the family and thirdly on the poor.

Application

- **Topic A: Give thanks to God *with* your money.** This is different to giving thanks *for* your money. To give your money away for the work of the LORD is to show that you recognise where the blessing of money comes from (Proverbs 3:9-10). How do you love the LORD with your money? Would you consider your giving an act of faith or an act of guilt or an act of works?
- **Topic B: Giving money to the poor** is a very clear instruction from the bible. With organisations in place to take money to the poor for us, how can we obey the principle of loving the poor? Discuss some issues and good godly practices for giving to the poor. Be careful that we seek to obey rather than seek to justify ourselves.
- **Topic C: Generating money for the next generation** is a wise thing but could also become an excuse for storing up unnecessary wealth. How do we police this for ourselves and how can we pass on godly wisdom on spending to our children?

Prayer for the week

*Lord, take our money and our lives and let us be only, ever, all for thee.
Amen.*

Sermon Notes

Proverbs: Wise Spending

Study 2 - Proverbs: Wise Emotions

Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4:26-27

Context

Humans are emotional creatures. We possess something beyond simple 'animal instincts' and we are created with complex passions with the potential for both good and evil. At the watershed moment of human testing, it was both reason and emotion that let us down. "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it." (Genesis 3:6) Eve's desires were tested and rather than being zealous for wisdom and life, she succumbed to the lure of Satan's lie. In the very next chapter of Genesis, Cain killed his own brother because he nurtured anger against him (Genesis 4:6-8). And so the story of the Bible repeats page after page with descriptions of rage, jealousy, mourning, grief, pride and envy. But our emotions give us the potential for great joy, excitement, laughter and love.

In the book of Proverbs, the greatest advice is to put on love while the loudest warnings involve the emotion called anger.

Discuss

What do you get angry about?

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Proverbs 14:10, 13

1. What do these verses teach us about the experience of emotion?

Verse 10: emotions are personal. We may have fun and laugh or cry alongside others but in the end our emotions are ours.

Verse 13: emotions are temporary. The emotions we feel at any moment will be replaced by other emotions later. While this verse speaks negatively, it is helpful for people feeling depressed or stressed or anxious to keep in mind that emotions do come and go and do not last forever.

2. Read the following verses from Proverbs and mark down what it is promoting or speaking against.

Read	What does it <i>promote</i> ?	What does it speak <i>against</i> ?
3:3-4	<i>Love</i>	<i>Love only sometimes</i>
14:17	<i>Self control</i>	<i>Quick temper and evil schemes</i>
14:29	<i>Patience</i>	<i>Quick temper</i>
14:35	<i>Wise service to authority</i>	<i>Provoking others esp. authority</i>
15:1	<i>Wise words</i>	<i>Foolish words</i>
15:18	<i>Patience and calming nature</i>	<i>Quick temper</i>
19:11	<i>Patience and letting offenses go</i>	<i>Harping on an offense</i>
19:19	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Hot temper</i>
20:2	<i>Keeping clear of wrath</i>	<i>Angering or provoking others</i>
21:14	<i>Soothing anger and pacifying wrath</i>	<i>(Jacob sending gifts ahead of him to his brother Esau might be an example of this)</i>
25:28	<i>Self control</i>	<i>Lack of self-control</i>
27:4	<i>Jealousy as worse than anger!</i>	<i>Anger, Fury and Jealousy</i>
29:8	<i>Pacifiers</i>	<i>Stirrers</i>
29:11	<i>Calming</i>	<i>Releasing rage</i>

29:22	<i>Calm and slow to anger</i>	<i>Stirring and hot temper</i>
30:33	<i>Peace</i>	<i>Stirring</i>

3. How do these four passages from the New Testament amplify or grow our understanding of emotions?

This is a good question to divide into four groups to look at one passage each. Once each group has discussed the passage, they can share with the larger group and discuss further if necessary.

Ephesians 4:26-27

Anger is not a sin but is an open door to it. There is short distance between the cause of our anger and sinning. Satan loves our anger and would prefer us to stew on it.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

'Love never fails' says it all. Just as Proverbs 3:3-4 teaches us to keep love at all times, 1 Corinthians 13 teaches us the depth and breadth of love.

Galatians 5:21-22

This list describes what the Holy Spirit enables us to do and get better at doing. These are the benefits of having the Spirit. They are all either emotions (love, joy and peace) or attitudes on how to express emotions (patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self control). They are all excellent things to pray to God that you would grow stronger in all of them!

Colossians 3:12-14

With the new life of the gospel and the knowledge that we are chosen and loved by God comes the joy of clothing ourselves with the nature of the Spirit.

Meaning

Proverbs promotes love (3:3) and demotes hot temper and rash rage (29:11, 22). God's wisdom is to foster contentment (14:30) and self-control (25:28) within and even assist in pacifying those around us (21:14). Life in Christ is lived in the new nature of the Spirit who plants and increases our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, godliness and self control.

Application

- **Topic A: Anger management.** While anger is not a sin (since God displays wrath and anger) it does manifest what we are most passionate for and that is for our own glory, not God's.

How can you make anger a signal to listen to where your heart is at? For example, count to ten and pray, then consider what your next move ought to be for the glory of God. Can you share a recent moment when this would have helped you?

- **Topic B: Pacifying, calming and self-control.** Our words can be used to cut people deeply or to heal. What are some examples of soothing words and calming remarks which can pacify a situation in either yourself (self-talk) or in another person? How does our knowledge of the gospel help us to choose words wisely?
- **Topic C: Memory verse.** Commit as a group to memorise Galatians 5:21-22 and/or 1 Corinthians 13!

Prayer for the week

Our Lord and our God, thank you for first loving us and being patient and slow to anger. Please help us to be clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Help us to bear with one another and to forgive one another as you forgave us. And over all of this, Father, please help us to put on love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Sermon Notes

Proverbs: Wise Emotions

Study 3 - Matthew 9:35-38

Praying for mission.

Pray to the Lord of the harvest. Matthew 9:38

Context

Our church has set aside the next fortnight to highlight our work on spreading the gospel and calling people to return to God through Christ. In this week's study, we will look at a short account from Matthew on spreading the gospel, which will hopefully lead to praying for the week ahead.

In this passage in Matthew, Jesus, who began to gather his disciples in Chapter 4 and tell them to be fishers of men, is now drawing in many people through his teaching and healing. While the disciples have been following Jesus and learning by watching, they are about to be sent out on their own to fish for men (Chapter 10 following).

Discuss

How does mission and evangelism make you feel?

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Matthew 9:35-38

- 1. "Jesus went...proclaiming the good news of the kingdom". What does this phrase mean? Discuss what the good news or gospel is.**

'Proclaiming' is to declare and make known as in a public voice and not secretly. He proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, which is that the kingdom is near and it's not too late to repent (Matthew 3:2). Matthew 5:3-12 reminds us that the kingdom are for those who are poor in spirit and who thirst and hunger for righteousness. The king has come and is calling people to make him their king.

- 2. Jesus compared the crowd with sheep and then to a crop field. What is learned from his metaphor of the harvest?**

It's not planting time or watering time but reaping time. The crop won't harvest itself. It needs workers.

3. What is Jesus' command according to Verses 37-38?

He wants more workers to be raised up. But his command is for us to pray to the Lord of the Harvest to raise up these workers. Our prayer won't be directed on more people to come or more people to be converted but for more Christians to get to work!

Meaning

Jesus has called the disciples and taught them about the kingdom of heaven. He has modelled to them what it is like to announce the good news that God's kingdom is ready to receive people who repent and desire it. Jesus expresses the need for more workers to do what Jesus is doing. His desire is for us to pray for more workers.

Application

- **Pray for workers for the harvest.** The week of mission is upon us and we need to pray. Use this list as a starting point for your group to pray together. Pray for...
 - The clear announcement that Jesus is Lord.
 - The clear announcement that Jesus saves.
 - That our church community will want more people to join us.
 - That our church community will proactively and boldly speak to others about their trust in Jesus.
 - Thank God that we have good news to tell.
 - Thank God that this is his mission and that he is the Lord of the harvest who wants this work to prosper.
 - Thank God for the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Thank God for one another and pray for one another for specific ideas and plans for mission.
 - Ask God to grow his kingdom through us.

Prayer for the week

Lord of the harvest, our saviour and our God, we ask you to raise up a desire amongst your people to share the good news of Jesus and to call in the elect. Bless us, we pray, as we respond to your call on us to speak up,

to invite and to proclaim Jesus as Lord. Give us courage, boldness and opportunity to make your son known this week. Amen.

Week 5 is mission week and groups are running dialogue dinners.

Study 4 - Mark 8:31-38

The concerns of God and the concerns of men.

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Mark 8:36

Context

This week's study is on the topic of Christian maturity. It does not fit into a series of other studies and yet it does naturally follow on from our focus on mission and proclaiming the word of God to the world around us. When you come to Christ to be saved, then what? If salvation is by grace alone, is there no change required from us? If there is change required, since repentance demands it, what does that change look like?

In Mark's gospel, the author wants to outline to us the good news about Jesus the Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1). Right in the middle of the book, after eight chapters of hearing clues about who Jesus is, Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the promised King of God (Mark 8:27-30). The disciples, who had given up everything to follow Jesus and learn from him, can now see that Jesus is God's chosen One. Their eyes are opened and Jesus is ready to let them in on the rest of his plans!

Discuss

A Christian is no different to anybody else except that they are saved by the blood of Jesus.

Read, Mark, Learn

Read Mark 8:31-38

- 1. According to Verses 31-33, what are the concerns of God? Read also Colossians 2:13-14, 1 Peter 2:24, Hebrews 9:28 and**

Colossians 1:15-23 to expand your discussion about God's concerns.

God is concerned about getting Christ to the cross. This is not for his own comfort and joy but for his love for the world. Jesus aligns himself with the 'Son of Man' identity which from Daniel 7 is a God figure who will have all authority - yet this Son of Man must suffer. Jesus' foreknowledge is more crisp and explicit than any Old Testament reference. The bible verses reinforce that God's plans and concerns are for the Christ to bring salvation by way of the cross.

2. What can be said about Peter's concerns?

Peter feels that he can persuade Jesus away from this plan and to avoid suffering and death. Jesus said that he had the concerns of men. It is short sighted and narrow thinking of Peter. These concerns of men are apparently the same as Satan's concerns. Peter was not simply proposing what they ought to have for dinner but that Jesus ought to abort the mission God sent him to do. Peter's concerns were aligned with the world's and with Satan's and not with God's.

3. In Verse 34, Jesus describes what a disciple must do. What are the three things he describes? Try to rephrase them in your own words.

*1) deny yourself - let go of survival instincts to be the winner
2) take up your cross - die with Jesus - learn to suffer and be concerned with God's concerns
3) follow Jesus - go where Jesus sends you and learn from him.*

4. Verses 34-38 describe the concerns of a disciple. What will a disciple of Jesus be concerned for? What are we called to lose and what are we promised to gain? How is Jesus' instructions ironic?

*1) Concerned for your own life 2) Concerned about the gospel 3) Concerned for your own soul - there is nothing more important or precious than that 4) Concerned about the reputation of Jesus (unashamed)
Jesus tells us to lose our lives. To put aside the concerns of men and get on board the eternal concerns of the Father.
The irony is stated, in order to save your life you must lose it. Also, it is ironic that in losing our lives we gain and save our soul.*

Meaning

God's concern is to save people through the death and resurrection of Jesus and he calls on us to share the same concern for ourselves. Following Jesus is a radical and complete commitment. If we want to be a disciple of Christ, we must follow him completely, unashamedly and faithfully. We forfeit our souls when we share the same concerns the world has.

Application

- **Topic A: Being unashamed of Jesus.** Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Jesus said that anyone who is ashamed of him and his words are disqualified from the kingdom of heaven. Discuss how these statements affect your life. What are some examples of being ashamed of Jesus and what are some examples of being unashamed?
- **Topic B: Taking up the cross.** Do you think of yourself as a disciple of Jesus? Discuss what a modern day disciple of Jesus looks like. Is it possible to be a Christian but not a disciple? How or to what degree are you taking up your cross?
- **Topic C: The concerns of God or the concerns of men.** How do we foster lives which are bound up with the concerns of God? How can we know if we are not or have strayed toward the concerns of men? Be sure to include a discussion of rebuking in your response.

Prayer for the week

Dear God and Father, thank you for the concerns that you have for the people of this world and the desire for us to see our greatest need which is in Jesus. Help us, we pray, to be concerned for the things that you are concerned about. May we love Jesus and obey him. May we see him more clearly and love him more dearly every day. Amen.

Sermon Notes

Christian Maturity

2 Thessalonians GFX

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

Welcome to the second letter to the church in Thessalonica. It should be noted that this is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to people in Thessalonica, whom he knew and had brought to faith in Christ himself (see Acts 17). It is, therefore, a somewhat personal letter with some details to which we are not privy.

We will be listening in on Paul's conversation to a church he knew and loved.

As we read through this letter you will notice the phrase 'brothers' (and sisters) occurring several times in the letter (in 1:3, 2:1, 2:13, 3:1, 3:6, 3:13). We will use these as section markers in the book but the real significance is the relationship that Paul has with this church. He sees them as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

It's not necessarily true that this is the second letter to the church. Charles Wanamaker, in his commentary on Thessalonians 1 and 2, argues that 2 Thessalonians is the first letter and 1 Thessalonians is the second. According to him, Paul sent this letter via Timothy when he heard concerns of their trouble about the second coming, then he had more information from Timothy and wrote more informatively in 1 Thessalonians. This may or may not be a true observation but it does help us to think twice before assuming.

Acts 17 provides ample background regarding the gospel coming to Thessalonica and the type of reception Paul received. What stands out in that passage is the persecution by the Jews. Roman civilization stood on Caesar ruling supreme, for this is where unity and stability was made. They were permitted to have their own religion as long as it didn't buck the state. The Jews enjoyed sanctuary under the Romans since their faith didn't require converts to it. The gospel that Paul brought to Thessalonica, on the other hand, was news that there is one absolute God who rules over all and one Messiah through whom all must come for salvation. This was not a personal

faith but a proclamation that Jesus is Lord of all. Jews converting to Christianity disturbed the very peace of Judaism.

The believers in Thessalonica heard the good news of Jesus Christ about 15 to 20 years after the ascension of Jesus. They were first generation Christians living in a pagan Roman world who had believed that Jesus had died, Jesus is risen and that Jesus will come again.

Study 5 - 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

God will...

*He will punish those who do not know God
and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
2 Thessalonians 1:8*

Context

Paul, with Silas and Timothy, came to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey which we read in Acts 17 (mostly Verses 1-10). Although it appears he was only in Thessalonica for a few weeks, there is reason to believe that he spent more time there than is implied. He describes in 1 Thessalonians 2:9 that he had worked among them and so was there long enough to establish himself in his trade. Also Philippians 4:15 mentions financial support being sent to him more than once while in Thessalonica. Perhaps he returned on another occasion or perhaps the account in Acts 17 is somewhat truncated. Either way, Paul had quite an impact on the church and the church had an impact on him. The persecution he received from the citizens, including the Jews of this town, was impressive and forms the backdrop to the first chapter of this letter.

Discuss

Share a time when it's been hard to stick at being Christian, and what it was that kept you persevering.

Read, Mark, Learn

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

- 1. This letter opens with a standard introduction to a letter by Paul (Verses 1-2). What do we learn here about the authors and recipients of this letter in particular? In light of the context, why might Paul open in this way?**

Author: Paul, Silas and Timothy (recall in Acts 16, Timothy joined Paul and Silas in their travels, and these three would have been together as they entered Thessalonica in Acts 17).

Recipients: church of God at Thessalonica in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- *A reminder that the church is firstly the church of God and of the Lord Jesus (not the church of Caesar, their earthly ruler) and so it is right that their allegiance is to God not to Rome (despite persecution).*
- *Also, the people of the church are IN Christ. This theme comes up again later in the chapter. Another reminder of their true identity being in Christ not in the state.*

Grace and peace: a standard phrase of greeting, but may be significant in light of the context of persecution. While they face feelings of hostility from around, they receive a greeting of peace from God through their faith in Jesus.

2. Re-read Verses 3-12 and break them into sections. Give a title to each section.

This is a good question to break into small groups of three or four. Allow each group time to discuss the question, share back and discuss any differences in their structure. They may come up with something like this:

Vs3-4 – the reason Paul prays

Vs 5-10 – God's judgement is right and is coming

Vs11-12 – what Paul prays

The following questions help to focus in on each of the 3 sections in more detail.

3. In Verses 3-4, Paul says that he “ought” to thank God for them. What does he thank God for and why is this significant? Why does Paul thank God rather than just encouraging the people to continue with these attributes?

Their faith is increasing – in persecution it would be easy for faith to decrease or be lost altogether, but they have growing faith. Faith in what?? Presumably the promises of God, and the fact that he will be faithful despite current circumstances.

Their love for each other is increasing, even against persecution. It would be easy to flee or shrink back in their faith, but they are sticking together, supporting each other as people in Christ.

Paul thanks God because it is God's work in them, since they are in Christ. God allows them to persevere in faith and love, through persecution. This is reinforced through the prayer in Verses 11-12 – Paul knows it is God who works in them to continue in this way, not their own work.

4. Focus on Verses 5-10. What do we learn about: a) God's character; b) the two outcomes of God's judgement; and c) when all this will happen? How do Verses 5-10 connect to the previous paragraph?

This is a good question to break into small groups again. You may like to ask each group to share back their answer for one part of the question.

God's character: his judgement is right, he is just. The persecution they are undergoing is proof that there is rebellion against God. (Verse 5)

Two outcomes of God's judgement:

- *Paying back trouble to the persecutors – punishing those who don't know God or obey gospel, everlasting destruction, shut out from presence of Jesus. (Verses 6, 8-9)*
- *Bringing relief to the persecuted – being counted worthy of the Kingdom (Verse 5), Jesus the true Lord is revealed (Verse 7), Jesus glorified in his people (Verse 10) Jesus marvelled at by his people (Verse 10).*

When will judgement happen: Jesus will be revealed from heaven, when he comes to be glorified in his holy people and marvelled at by believers.

Verse 5 – "all this is evidence that". If they look at the persecution they are facing and how they are being treated (Verse 3-4), this is a sign/evidence that God's right judgement must be coming and bringing justice to those who believe. They are witnessing mankind's rebellion against God.

5. Why should the Thessalonians keep persevering?

They should keep persevering knowing that no matter what they suffer now, God is right in his judgement and justice will come both to them and the persecutors. They keep persevering knowing who God is, and what he will do on the last day.

6. In Verses 11-12, Paul, Silas and Timothy pray "with this in mind". What do they keep in mind? What do they pray about and why?

They pray with their persecution and the coming judgement of God in mind.

They pray that God will make them worthy of his calling- they are already living lives worthy of the Kingdom (Verse 5) but he wants this to continue (Verse 11).

They pray that God will enable them to live their lives prompted and guided by faith – because again, it is God's work in them that does this.

They pray it all so that Jesus may be glorified in them, and them in him when he returns – they want them to end up receiving 'relief' from the judgement, not being 'paid back'. What a marvelous thought that Jesus may be glorified in us!

Meaning

There is a clear and present danger that Christians today may take their eyes off our future hope and relief and be overcome by the suffering of persecution. By the grace of God we pray that the church will live lives worthy of the gospel, knowing that today's trouble reminds us of future judgment and stirs us to desire God now. God

will bring disaster on trouble makers and bring eternal peace and glory to those who stand firm with him today.

Application

- **Topic A: Persecution and trials.** There is no doubt that heavy persecution occurs around the world today against Christians. In Australia, physical persecution is not common. We can even enjoy great friendships with unbelievers in this country. Resistance is present though and our faith can be tested here too. Discuss ways you feel being Christian can be counter cultural to the point of discomfort or worse. How can you turn those feelings into hope for the future? How can our knowledge of God's coming just judgement and Jesus' return, help us to respond well in these trials?
- **Topic B: Desiring to be in the presence of the Lord.** The ultimate future described in 2 Thessalonians 1 is that we will stand amazed in the presence of the Lord. Share how this is or isn't a compelling future for you, especially in the face of persecution or hardship. What can we do to set our hearts in this direction? Perhaps praying through Verses 11 and 12 will be part of the answer.
- **Topic C: Prayer for the church.** Paul, Silas and Timothy pray for the Thessalonian church with real gospel and Kingdom concerns. Think about the content of your own prayers, or the prayers of the group. How could you shape your prayers together around Kingdom concerns like Paul, Silas and Timothy do here?

Prayer of the Week

Heavenly Father and Jesus our Lord, thank you for calling us into your holy church. Please make us worthy of this calling. May our hearts desire goodness and may you bring those desires to fruition. When other people make it hard for us to keep following you, help us to remember your just judgement on all people, and the relief that will come to those of us who

are in Christ. We pray this so that Your name may be glorified in us and that we may be glorified in You. We pray all of this according to your grace, O God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Notes

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Study 6 - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The present age of restrained rebellion.

...all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. 2 Thessalonians 2:12

Context

Paul is writing a personal letter to one particular church, the gathering of Christians in Thessalonica. He knows them and has taught them many things. Paul boasts of their faith and especially of the work of God that he is doing amongst the believers. Paul is impressed that God is growing them and keeping them in the faith despite strong opposition. There are hints throughout this chapter that show we do not know everything about the relationship between Paul and this church. For example, in Verse 5, we cannot remember what Paul has told them because we were not there. We will now read the beginning of Chapter 2 and eavesdrop on his correspondence to them.

Discuss

'Remember the days of the old school yard, we used to laugh a lot.'
(Cat Stevens)

Think about the times we live in now. How would someone in 50 years' time look back on these days? Put another way, what is it that characterises this time in which we live? You might like to finish the sentence "Remember the days of....."

Read, Mark, Learn

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

- 1. Look at Verses 1-4. What do we learn about why Paul is writing this section? How does this section connect to the previous chapter?**

Paul is writing about the day when the Lord Jesus will return, and Christians will be gathered together to him. He specifically wants them not to be deceived into thinking that this day has already come and gone.

While in Chapter 1 it was established that the day WILL COME when God will judge all people, and either bring 'relief' or 'pay back', now Paul is expanding the issue of WHEN this day will come.

- 2. A key character in this section is the 'man of lawlessness'. Look through the whole passage again and list everything we learn about this man. Is there anything about him which you find particularly striking or confusing?**

This is a good question to break into small groups of 2 or 3. Allow people to discuss the question, share back some points, and then have some extended open discussion regarding points of interest and questions. It's ok if all the questions don't get answered.

- *the day of the Lord won't come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed Verses 3-4.*

People might ask - what rebellion? Try not to get too caught up in this - we need to be careful to not get deceived ourselves by endless speculation about details which aren't clear. What is clear is that there will be a rebellion and a revealing, and the man of lawlessness has a set destiny - destruction.

- *he will oppose God / put himself over God Verse 4*
- *he will claim to be God Verse 4*
- *he is being held back now to be revealed later and then to be taken away Verse 6*

It is ironic that the one who is claiming to be god, is having his power held back by the one who actually is God.

- *his power is 'secret' and is already at work Verse 7*

It is secret in that it is hidden from people. People don't see it or realise that the lawless man's power is at work now. The power is the lie. This is the way Satan works and the man (whether Satan or else) will and already uses deceit and lies to gather in the wicked who will not believe the truth.

- *once he is revealed, the Lord Jesus will overthrow him with his breath and his coming Verse 8*

The length of the battle is not given, but what is clear is that Jesus will win.

- *his coming will be in accordance with how Satan works Verse 9*

Satan has a method which matches that of the lawless one. He won't be a whole new variety of evil, he will use the same strategies that Satan has been using to oppose God and that will be deception.

- *He uses signs and wonders to portray a lie Verse 9*

3. Look at Verses 9-12. Who are the two types of believers described? What is God's role in their beliefs?

Those who 'believe the lie' (Verse 11). Those who refuse to love the truth (Verse 10). They have been deceived by the lawless one's signs and wonders. They will perish (Verse 10). They will be condemned (Verse 12). They delight in wickedness (Verse 12).

God's role (Verse 11) '...God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie...' "This implies that God is not idly waiting and watching us to see what we will do - whether we will come to him or reject him. Rather, God is active in this world for both those who receive him and those who reject him. In God's sovereignty he allows (but not passively) deception to exist and flaunt its power in our world so that the lie can be believed if that is our choice. He allows us to choose between The Truth and The Lie.

By implication - those who love the truth and so are saved.

4. In summary, from the passage how could we describe the time we are in now? How could we describe the time to

come? What is the implied call to action for God's people now?

Now -

- *It is a time of retrained deception. The lawless one is at work with signs and wonders deceiving people, yet God restrains his power.*
- *It is a time of waiting for the revealing and rebellion of the lawless one, and Jesus return*
- *It is a time where some people refuse to believe the truth, whereas others believe.*

Time to come -

- *The lawless one will be revealed and will rebel, yet Jesus will overthrow him.*
- *Those who believe the truth will be saved. Those who believe the lie will not.*

Call to action-

- *Don't be deceived. Keep believing the truth and resisting wickedness.*

Meaning

We live in a world of restrained rebellion. All around us is information pleading with us to reject the truth and delight in wickedness with the lawless one. His power is in deceiving the world secretly. God's power is in restraining his full ability right up to the moment in which the lawless one will be destroyed. Don't worry about the end of the world, you won't miss it. Rather, be concerned about the pursuit of truth.

Application

- **Ways of nurturing the truth and discerning lies.** How do we pursue the truth in a world that is seduced by wickedness? List ways that our lives are exposed to the lies of Satan. List also ways that our hearts and minds can be fed with truth. Discuss whether you are pursuing truth or being unsettled in your faith by untruth.
- **Having an ever present awareness of Christ's return.** Paul is not doubting the return of Christ. He is, in fact, positive that when it comes, it will be a hell of a show! Is the return of Christ a truth that shapes your goals and priorities in life? Why or why not? What, if anything, should change because of this reality?
- **Praising God for his power and might.** Any hint or idea that the power of the lawless one is a challenge to God is removed

in Verse 8 as well as Verse 6. We can praise God that despite the hiddenness of his power in this world now, we know that he is completely in control. Use this as a theme to pray together now and encourage one another to dwell on this in the week that remains. How can knowledge of God's supremacy help you in your work and personal life?

Prayer for the week

Our Lord and our God, keep us directed to the truth and away from the lure of the evil one. Help us in this age of evil restraint to share with others the nature of the truth and so lead many to you, Lord Jesus. May we meditate on your word and bring to mind the promise and hope of the gospel, so that we will pursue truth and reject wickedness. Amen.

Sermon Notes

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Study 7 - 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

The Present Age of Deed and Word.

*...saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
2 Thessalonians 2:13*

Context

Paul's letter to the people in Thessalonica, who responded to the gospel with belief, has been filled with words of affirmation for their growing faith, prayer for their ongoing faithfulness and assurance that they have not missed anything that God is planning to do. The future holds a victory day when all of Satan's plans and power will be overthrown as Christ returns. Paul sets the attention of the church, not on the future, but on the present where the evil one is presently at work although restrained. We live in a present age of restrained rebellion.

Discuss

What I think is just as important as what I do.

Read, Mark, Learn

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

- 1. The Thessalonians were asked by Paul to give thanks to God that they were loved by him. Re-read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 and discuss how they knew they were loved by God.**

They knew they were loved by God because they were:

- *chosen by God to trust in the truth found in the gospel.*
- *'firstfruits'. This indicates they were chosen in the beginning (Verse 13b) - they were the first generation of Christians in the world - facing persecution as they waited for the coming of Christ, holding firm to the knowledge and truth given to them*
- *Saved by the Holy Spirit. They were sanctified (Verse 13b) - undergoing an ongoing, life changing transformation that occurs to every believer involving the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and working with their spirit to be holy and set apart.*
- *Saved through their belief in truth (Verse 13b) - they knew who the Lord was and responded to it.*
- *Called through the Gospel to share Christ's glory (Verse 14). Christ died for them, the Spirit dwells in them, God called them, they believed the word.*

2. In Verse 15, the Thessalonians were called to stand firm and hold firm to the teachings. Re-read Verses 15-17 and explain how they could stand firm to the teachings.

They can stand firm because they have been given the words of eternal life. They need to be unwavering in their attention/focus to the gospel they have heard. They need to ensure they don't let others distract them from their teachings. They need to come back to the teachings about Jesus and hold everything they hear up against these teachings

3. In Verse 16, Paul states that God and Jesus gave eternal encouragement and hope. Who were the Thessalonians trusting and why did they trust them?

The Thessalonians were trusting God - OUR father and Jesus - King Jesus the chosen one. They trusted them because of the fact that they loved them and gave them eternal encouragement and hope. This hope and encouragement is what God has promised to deliver in the future and is what helps them (and us) to remain strong in the face of trials.

4. a) Consider situations where people are promised great things. For example, a wife hears the news that her husband is returning from war. How can these situations show encouragement and hope?

b) Paul explains that God promises eternal encouragement and hope. Re-read Verses 16-17. How is this promise seen? What do the Thessalonians need to do as a result of believing this promise?

The promise is seen because no obstacles or persecution or trials will crush you when you are encouraged by the knowledge that God chose you, called you, saved you, delivered you and sanctified you.

As a result of this knowledge the Thessalonians' words and actions need to be good reflecting their love for God and others. Paul's prayer is that they will do this rather than act and speak from selfish desires.

Meaning

What we believe will affect what we do and say. If we believe that we are spinning freely in this universe without a secure hope or future then we will get on board the earth's so-called mantra of 'survival of the fittest.' If, however, we believe that God has loved us, chosen us, called us, saved us, sanctified us, is perfecting us, and promising us to share in the glory with Jesus for all eternity, no catches; then this will give our hearts great courage and conviction to do what is right and say only what is true and loving.

Application

- **Topic A: Becoming more Christ-like.** Share how God has been perfecting you over the last few years or months. What can you say about the process of becoming more Christ-like? How has it been occurring? What part do you play in the process?
- **Topic B: Giving thanks by upholding others.** Spend time in prayer now and then practise over the next few days thanking God for all the blessings listed in this passage. For example, thank God firstly that he loves you. Reflect with God in prayer over that it was God that chose you and not the other way around. Use 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 to shape your prayers about yourself but also for everyone in your group.

Prayer for the week

Our Father and our God, we thank you for the love that you have shown on us by sharing the gospel with us, helping us to believe, sending your Spirit to us, confirming in our hearts that Jesus is Lord and helping us to become more and more like him. Strengthen us and encourage us to love

you and others more and more, especially as the Day of Christ's return draws nearer. Amen.

Sermon Notes

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Study 8 - 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Partnership in prayer.

*Now may the Lord direct your hearts toward
the love of God and the endurance of Christ.
2 Thessalonians 3:5*

Context

Paul's letter to the people in Thessalonica, who responded to the gospel with belief, has been filled with words of affirmation for their growing faith, prayer for their ongoing faithfulness and assurance that they have not missed anything that God is planning to do. The future holds a victory day when all of Satan's plans and power will be overthrown as Christ returns. Paul sets the attention of the church, not on the future, but on the present where the evil one is presently at work although restrained. We live in a present age of restrained rebellion.

Discuss

What motivates you to pray?

Read, Mark, Learn

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

- 1. In Verses 1-2, Paul explores why the Thessalonians should be praying right there and then. Discuss the reasons. Consider why Paul's letter is just as relevant for us today.**

Be praying:

- *So the gospel message will be spread quickly (Verse 1)*
- *So the message of the Lord is honored by others (Verse 1)*
- *So they will be delivered from the evil one, Satan, and his plans (Verse 2)*
- *Because not everyone has faith (Verse 2)*
- *Because praying will continue to help the message of God's faithfulness and plan (Verse 2)*

Being prayerful is relevant for us today for exactly the same reasons - God is still faithfully honouring his plans for us and we live in a world where the evil one is still at work and people still need God's truth revealed to them.

1. In Verses 3-4, the Thessalonians are called to continue trusting the Lord. What evidence does Paul use to show them why they should do this? If we, like the Thessalonians trust God, what do we need to do in light of these two verses and why?

Evidence that the Thessalonians need to continue to trust God:

- *God is faithful - he saves through the gospel (Verse 3)*
- *God will protect those who are faithful from the evil one ('...and protect you from the evil one' Verse 3)*
- *God will continue to help those who are faithful to both grow in their faith and share their faith ('..he will strengthen you..' Verse 3)*
- *The Thessalonians need to continue to pray, immerse themselves in the gospel, share the gospel, be faithful to God's promises (Verse 4)*

If we trust the Lord, we need to be maintaining our faith by praying for others and immersing ourselves in the gospel, sharing the gospel with those who don't know/trust God. We do this because of God's faithfulness and plan. (Verse 1-5)

2. Based on Verses 1-5, what are some ways Paul wants the Thessalonians to stand firm and hold fast to God's word?

- *Paul wants them to:*
- *pray because God is faithful (Verse 1-5)*
- *realise that God is faithful through time (Verse 1-5)*
- *understand that he will protect them from the evil one (Verse 3)*
- *Realise that God has a plan that is seen through his love and the Lord's perseverance (Verse 5)*
- *realise that their gospel mission will be challenged but they can remain faithful (Verse 3)*
- *Be faithful because of what God has already done*

3. Paul's prayer in Verse 5 is for the Thessalonians. What is Paul encouraging them to do? Could we do the same today?

Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians (and therefore us) to “direct their hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance” because this allows them to:

- *realise that God’s plan will stand the test of time*
- *realise that God sent his Son to redeem them (and us)*
- *consider where their hearts are and perhaps where they should be - being faithful to God’s plan, praying for the rapid spread of the gospel*
- *grow the church by treasuring the love God has for them and the work that Christ has done,*
- *understand what they can learn through Christ’s example of perseverance.*
- *remain faithful*

Meaning

What is of utmost importance is that the gospel be honoured in our lives. It must be spread regardless of possible hostility. It provides assurance and comfort to those who believe. It is to be our treasure. We are to uphold one another in prayer for the sake of the gospel.

Application

- **Topic A: Spreading God’s word.** Paul desired the gospel to spread rapidly. Is this a desire for us? In what way do we seek for the gospel to be passed on? Is ‘rapid’ a word you could use of yourself or the church?
- **Topic B: Upholding God’s works.** Pray for missionaries. Paul requested prayer as he desired to take the gospel abroad and be unhindered in doing that. Talk about the missionaries that we support as a church and how we can be praying for them. Spend time in prayer.
- **Topic C: Spiritual battles require faithful people to pray.** Paul promised protection from the evil one and prayed for the hearts of the believers to be oriented toward God. Are you conscious of the spiritual battle and our need to pray for one another in this manner? Paul does not need to ask the Thessalonians for prayer points when he decides to pray for them.

Prayer for the week

Heavenly Father, we pray for the gospel to go out into all the world. Both at home and abroad, please hold back wicked and evil people and keep

your servants faithful to the gospel. May we all direct our hearts to your love and the work of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Notes

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Study 9 - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Working it all out.

As for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good. 2 Thessalonians 3:13

Context

Paul's brief letter is coming to an end. It has been a positive letter toward the Thessalonians, referring to them as brothers and sisters and showing gratitude to God for the work that he is clearly doing in the church there. He has reassured them that they will not miss the Lord's coming and that while they wait, they ought to pray for one another to stand firm in the gospel. The Thessalonian Christians are not regarded as wicked or evil people but as people who honoured the Lord's message when it came to them.

So, how would you close a letter to brothers and sisters in Christ who have been assured that Jesus' return is still yet to come? What final message would seem appropriate to friends in the Lord who have been deceived once already about the times they are living in?

Discuss

Have you ever heard of the 'Christian work ethic'? What do you think that means?

Read, Mark, Learn

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

- 1. Paul has written to the church about idle and disruptive people. Look at Verses 6 and 14. How serious does Paul regard the issue?**

Note that he invokes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for this and calls it a command! The discipline for those who aren't listening is for the church to distance themselves from them. That is, make it clear that they are not behaving as a believer ought to behave. The command has the authority of Jesus Christ and is to be dealt with in the church seriously.

**2. "They are not busy; they are busybodies." (Verse 11)
Discuss the problem Paul describes in Verses 6-12. 1 Timothy 5:13 may assist your discussion.**

Paul describes how he refused to be a burden on others and that those who are idle are also disruptive and busybodies. The NET version reads, "not doing their own work but meddling in the work of others." They are pictured as undisciplined (see NET) and unsettled (Verse 12). It seems that they have found the Christian community to be a source of food without putting effort in. Anyone not working is prone to meddling in other people's lives. Anyone who is able to work ought to work.

3. A positive command from Paul is found in Verse 13, "never tire of doing what is good." How does this sentence relate to work?

Paul is speaking out against idleness. (St Jerome (4th century AD) said, "Idle hands are the devil's playthings"). Idleness is likely to lead to meddling in the affairs of others or some other mischief. The way forward is to occupy your time with doing good. In the first place, this is about earning what you eat. Doing good is about loving your neighbour while bludging off others is not a sign of love when it can be avoided.

This is a very clear command for life: never tire of doing what is good. The minute we do, we create a foothold for the devil.

4. Verses 16-18 seem like a sudden change in gear from the rebuke of Verses 14-15. How can this whole section be used to describe the church of Christ?

The church is a community of believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we will fall in line with anything that he commands. He is the Lord of peace and grace. Christians have the blessing of Christ on them. They are people of grace. As brothers and sisters in the Lord, we will take note when obedience to Jesus is not being followed. Christians are to live in peace with one another and to support one another as well as warn one another lest they end up meddling rather than being ready to do good. People of grace will demonstrate love through obedience.

Meaning

Work together as gospel partners. Firstly, do all you can to earn a living since that is the order of life - if you don't work, you don't eat; and loving your neighbour includes working your share. Secondly, warn a so-called brother or sister who appears to be wasting their time and others. We may actually fail when we choose to carry others rather than rebuke or correct. Better to correct an idle person

than to have them wear others down. The Christian community ought to be seen as living by grace and eager to do good.

Application

- **Topic A: Busybodies.** Given that the problem Paul describes is about disruptive busybodies, what equivalent would we have in our church community today? NB: remember to love one another in this response especially those not in the room!
- **Topic B: Warning like a brother.** "...that they may feel ashamed" says Verse 14. How is this an act of love or doing good? What countercultural practice is 2 Thessalonians teaching us and how should we be wise in the area of rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness?
- **Topic C: Working like a Christian.** Are Verses 6-15 instructing us to be workaholics? Why or why not? Perhaps consider what Paul's primary agenda was when he was so busy working (compare 3:1 with 3:8-9).

Prayer of the Week

Our Father in heaven, thank you for life and health and safety, for the pleasure to work and the leisure to rest. May we participate in this life as you have planned us to by keeping ourselves engaged in life for the good of others while we wait for Jesus Christ our Lord to return. Amen.

Sermon Notes

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

