

Together, in God we hope

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Preacher: Michael Woo

[0 : 0 0] Before I begin, let's pray. Father Lord, we pray that you will help me to speak your words and not mine, and help all of us to hear your word today.

Remove distractions, especially those of us tuning in online. We ask that your spirit will convict our hearts, that we might hear you clearly, and that we might live your way to please you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Now, if you were to Google, teamwork saves lives, 9 out of 10 of the top articles will be healthcare or medical related.

I don't know if you know this, but doctors always work in teams in the hospital. To do their jobs well, they actually need others. Doctors think they can do it all, but sorry to all the doctors who are in the congregation, you need others, and others need you.

See, teamwork saves lives. I remember when I was a medical officer in the obstetric wards, that is where people deliver babies, and one of my colleagues told me the story.

[1 : 0 7] She was about to see a mother and a newborn, and she was just about to step into the room of the mother, and as she looks down at the clipboard with the baby's name, she sees, and get this right, this is the baby's name.

It's spelled E-S-P-N. E-S-P-N. So there she was, just about to enter the room, and she looked at it, and she thinks that this can't be the baby's name.

And just in the nick of time, the nurse next to her saves her. The nurse next to her swoops in and says, Doctor, it's pronounced Aspen. It's pronounced Aspen.

The nurse saves her life. Teamwork saves lives. True story. Now in healthcare, they need each other. But is that how you think of the Christian life?

Or do you have a very individualistic way of thinking about Christianity? My faith is between me and God and nobody else. Sure, the church is good, but I don't need the church to be Christian.

[2 : 1 6] And maybe you're listening in, and you're not a Christian. And maybe you have even more fundamental thoughts, like why should I even bother with church? In fact, the church is dangerous.

You know, the church brainwashed the week, take their money, abused children. How can you trust them? In Australia, there are plenty of people who think just like that.

You know, by the way, when the Bible talks about church, the Bible doesn't mean the building. They don't even mean the institution. The word church simply means gathering.

The church is a gathering of God's people week by week. It's the people that is the church. And in this letter, 1 Thessalonians, it was written to a young church.

A church going through lots of hardship. From Acts chapter 17, we know Paul planted this church in Thessalonica, but he could only stay for about three weeks.

[3 : 1 4] And because of persecution, they actually had to leave the town at night in secret. See, Paul's main concern was that they, the Thessalonian Christians, would leave the faith.

See, what's more important than conversion is persevering on until the end. Persevering on despite the temptations and the opposition of the world. See, as a church, Paul wanted them to be committed to each other in love.

Determined to strengthen each other in holiness. As they head towards the climax of the Christian life, the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says the day is approaching, in chapter 5, like a thief in the night.

No one will know when it comes. See, waiting for that hope means staying spiritually awake.

Spiritually sober. To live out that hope as the children of the day. As children of the day. So today's passage, Paul talks about how to do that together as the church.

[4 : 26] See, rather than teamwork saves lives, the Bible says that the church is more than a team. It is your family. Your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul seems to think that you need this family. You need one another to reach this climax's end safely. Which is why he ends this letter with a list of instructions about life together as a church family.

It's a very practical passage. How to stand firm in hope together as a church. So that we are always ready for Jesus to return.

I want to look at this passage in five parts. If you have an outline, follow along. Number one, how to treat those who lead us. That is verses 12 to 13.

Number two, how to treat one another. And then how to relate to God. Verses 16 to 18. How to treat God's word. Verses 19 to 22. And then hoping together in a faithful God.

[5 : 28] So how to treat those who lead us. How to treat one another. How to treat God. How to treat his word. And hoping in a faithful God. Now the first thing that Paul addresses in standing firm together.

Is actually how to treat those who lead us in church. Turn to verse 12. It says, See, to acknowledge is to have proper recognition.

To respect. To honor. And Paul actually gives three descriptions of the Christian leader. To help the Thessalonian Christians to do that.

To honor and respect their leaders. Firstly, the leaders are called those who work hard among you. Now when I was. When I first talked to my parents about.

Thinking about full time ministry. My mom said. You know, why can't you do just both? You know, on the weekdays. You work as a doctor. And then on the weekends. You preach.

[6 : 36] Yeah. Right. They don't think that now. Of course. But at the time. The impression was that. You know. All the pastor does is preach on a Sunday. And you can even do it as a part time.

Right. After all. For six days. I can't see him. For the one day I can see him. I can't understand him. Right. Isn't it interesting? Have you ever wondered.

To yourself. What does my minister do. Over the weekday? Does he go fishing? Does he play golf? Is that why he's such a good golfer? You know.

People. Do think. Like that. But no. Paul describes them as those. Who labor. And work hard. Among all of you.

They don't just preach Sunday's sermons. Even though that. If done. Faithfully. Is hard work. Struggling. Toiling. Praying. And wrestling.

[7 : 33] With God's word. To teach you. We can be tough. That's hard work. But on top of that. There's baptizing. Marrying. Burying the dead. Advising and counseling. Those who are troubled.

Comforting those who are grieving. And sick. Training and raising up the next generation. Organizing and administrating the church. And even then. Praying ceaselessly.

For the flock. To remain. Stakefast. In Christ. The word Paul uses here. Is the word for manual labor.

Your pastor. Your elder. Your leader. They are toiling and working hard. Physically. Mentally. Emotionally. For your sake. Paul must have known.

That for the church members of Thessalonica. To acknowledge and respect their leaders. The first thing they must understand. Is that they are those who labor and toil hard.

[8 : 32] For their sake. Secondly. Paul says that they are those who care for you. Actually the ESV translates it more literally.

As those who are over you in the Lord. And they are not separate ideas. They are over you to care for you. See remember this is a young church. Months old.

You know. At most. You can imagine how the congregation. Might be thinking of their leaders. They say. Hey. This leader. You've only been Christian. As long as I have. Right. This other pastor.

He's younger than me. You know. In Cantonese. They say. It means I eat more salt than you eat rice. Right. I have way more life experience than you. How can I respect you?

Paul says. God has placed them in a position of leadership over you in the Lord. Their authority and leadership is not to be abused.

[9 : 28] As has sadly happened in history. The leader is to model after Jesus. You know. In Mark. Chapter 10. Verse 42. Jesus says.

The son of man came not to be served. But to serve. And to give his life as a ransom for many. See the Christian minister is a servant. That is what the word minister means.

They serve you. By leading you faithfully. In God's word. Put another way. They use their God given authority. To serve your good.

To care for you. To care for your soul. The third descriptor. Would come as a surprise to many of us. Paul calls them.

Those who admonish you. See admonish means to scold. Or to reprimand. Often to correct wrong behavior. Or wrong doctrine. No. It doesn't mean that.

[10 : 26] The leader has to be harsh. But it is always something hard. Both for the leader. And for the congregation member. You see. It's easy to be led.

Where you already want to go. But it's much harder. Isn't it? To be admonished. In modern day. Such practices of admonishing. Correcting. Is a rarity.

Again. We live in an increasingly. Individualistic world. And we carry these things. Into our Christian life. Since my faith is about me. And God.

And nobody else has the right. To say anything. Who are you to judge me? And what's worse. As Asians. As Asians. We are conflict averse. Isn't it?

You know. When there's an issue. We would much rather. Just sweep it under the carpet. You know. Don't bother about it. We would rather live. With the elephant in the room. Than to bring it up.

[11 : 19] And risk potential conflict. We are risk averse. See. We don't mind the pastor preaching. Far away in the pulpit. But don't you dare tell me.

What I'm doing wrong. Don't you tell me to change. It's not your place. Actually. It is. Paul calls them.

Those who admonish you. If someone starts teaching. In your church. That Jesus is not God. The leader. Hopefully. Would admonish them. If someone in the congregation.

Is in obvious. Immoral. Living an obvious. Immoral life. Unrepentant. The leader. If he loves him. Should admonish him. Now.

Those of us. Who are parents. Know that admonishing. Is hard work. I have a daughter. I call Ellie. Almost two years old. Let me tell you. It is much easier.

[12 : 13] To let her. Just stand on the high chair. Than to admonish her. To ask her to sit down. And to face. Screaming. And crying. See. But I do it.

Because. I love her. I don't want her to fall. I want to teach her. But admonishing. Is way harder. It's much easier to do this. Let her do whatever she wants. And in fact.

This is. Not just the Christian leader. In verse 14. Paul actually says. It's the responsibility. Of all Christians. And we'll see that later. But your pastor and leader.

Have particular responsibilities. Not because they're somehow. Morally superior than you. But because they love you. That's why they warn you. And admonish you. Away from danger.

It's much easier for them. Trust me. It's much easier for them. To just let things slide. And to risk offending you. It's hard and uncomfortable. But in fact. Paul says. You should acknowledge them.

[13 : 07] And in fact. Verse 13 says. Hold these leaders. With high regard. In love. Paul says. Respect them. Love them. Why?

Verse 13. Because of their work. See. They're trying to build you up. They're trying to keep you ready. And safe.

In the time when Jesus returns. Sadly. So many churches. You know. Are dissatisfied. And. They disagree.

Their leaders. Leading to quarrels. And fights. And that's why Paul. Writes in the last part. Of verse 13. Live. With peace. Sorry. Live in peace.

With each other. See. When church members. And pastors. Go head to head. And fight. What is the outcome? I doubt.

[14 : 01] Its growth. In love. And faith. And hope. Our God. In verse 23. It says. Our God. Is a God of peace. Our gospel. Is a gospel.

Of forgiveness. And reconciliation. And peace. So church. Do you. Respect. And love. Your leaders. Your pastors.

Your elders. When you feel. Dissatisfied. Or disappointed. With them. Are you able. To bring them up. Not in a quarrelsome way. But in a way.

That encourages. Gospel peace. God says. This is how. You should relate. To your leaders. Help them.

Help you. So that together. You will be growing. In love. And hope. Ready. For when. Jesus returns. Number two. How to treat.

[14 : 56] One another. In church. Verses 14. To 15. Let me start. With a summary. In verse 15. It says. Always strive. To do. What is good. For each other. For that.

Is what love is. You know. Love is not primarily. A feeling. Deep inside. Love is an act. See. Love is a self-sacrificial act.

Of doing. What is good. For the other. Now. Let me say that again. Love is not primarily. A feeling. It is an act. It is a self-sacrificial act. Of doing what is good. For the other. And Paul already says.

In chapter 4. He wants them to love. He urges them. To do so more and more. And here. Paul says. Strive to do just that. To do what is good. For the other. In verse 11.

Just like. Last week you were seen. It says. To build each other up. Now. Verse 14. Gives us a list. Of different ways. On how to do that. Turn to verse 14.

[15 : 50] It says. We urge you. Brothers and sisters. Warn those who are idle. And destructive. Encourage the disheartened. Help the weak. Be patient. With everyone. See.

Paul. Is very practical. He knows. That doing good. Actually looks different. For different people. In different situations. See.

It is not a one size. Fit all. Those who are idle. That is lazy. And destructive. They need to be warned. Actually. The word here. Used.

Is the same word. As verse 12. Admonish. They need to be admonished. See. They need to be corrected. If they are idle. And destructive. But there are others. In church.

Who are disheartened. And discouraged. They don't need. A scolding. They need. Encouragement. Those who are weak. Spiritually. And physically. They need.

[16 : 45] Help. The idle. The destructive. The disheartened. The weak. We often see these people. As problem people.

In the church. Don't we? That's why Paul. Says. At the end of this list. He said. Be patient. With everyone. See. Many times.

When I was growing up. When I was growing up. I saw. Youths. Labeled as. Difficult. Or hopeless. Case. And then. They are basically. Ignored.

They are left to do. Whatever they want. With their lives. I myself. Have labelled. Someone as difficult. Until someone. Much wiser.

Come up. Came up to me. And said. Mike. Have you tried. Talking to that person. And telling them. To stop doing that. Talking to that person. That's. That's a good idea. See.

[17 : 39] Paul says. Be patient. Change takes time. There are always ways. To build. People up. You know.

Most of us. Can already think. Of someone. Who is. Maybe in sin. Unrepentant. And actually. Need. Some admonishment.

Some of us. Can think of people. Who are disheartened. And discouraged. And need encouragement. Maybe. We need to take. Some time out.

Of our busy schedule. To actually listen. And talk to them. And encourage them. The question is this. Do we love them enough. To do that.

For them. Do we love them enough. To do that for them. Maybe God. Is saying to you today. Through this. Very practical. Word. Of God. To not let this pass.

[18 : 36] Without doing. Anything about it. Pray for God. To give you. That love. For this person. Or. Whoever it is. That you are thinking of. Now don't pretend.

To just. Sweep it under the carpet. Because that's not. Actually loving for them. It doesn't tilt them up. It doesn't keep them safe. Until Jesus returns. Think about. That person's.

Walk with God. And think about. The joy it is. To see them. Stand firm. Until the end. Where you can rejoice. Together. In heaven. Love them enough. To do something.

About it. Now. If you are a recipient. If you are the recipient. Of someone who comes up. And says. Hey you know. I haven't seen you. In church for a long time.

What's going on. Don't immediately. Be defensive about it. It actually probably took. The person a lot of effort. To come up and say that. Actually receive it. With gratitude.

[19 : 32] And thankfulness. That this brother. Loves you enough. To actually warn you. And verse 15. Paul says. Make sure that nobody. Pays back. Wrong.

For wrong. But always strive. To do what is good. For each other. And for everyone else. Now this is. A completely. Countercultural. At the time. Paul knows that.

You know. Paul actually knows. That in church. We are sinners. We are sinners. Who have been forgiven. And that means. That in our sin. We would have wronged. Other people. Whether intentionally. Or not.

And that other people. Would have wronged us. But Paul says. Strive to do good. And not just others. In church. He says. For everyone else. For the Thessalonian church. That means.

Doing good to. Their enemies. Those who are. Persecuting them. This is extremely. Countercultural. And even today. It is. You know.

[20 : 25] We. We love to do good. To those. Who love us. Right. But to do good. For those. Who have hurt us. And wronged us. See.

That is when. There is no doubt. That the power. Of the gospel. Is on display. Because when we love. Our enemies. When we love. And do good.

To those who wronged us. That is something. Out of this world. See. We don't give enough credit. To how unique. The church is. As a community. When I was.

In one of the churches. In Australia. There is a non-Christian. Couple. From the Middle East. Who came to church. And after the whole. Time in church. The friend who brought them.

Drove them back home. And. And this. Person actually said. You know. You know what struck me. What struck me. Was that the people. In church. Actually. Genuinely.

[21 : 19] Cared. For one another. When they ask you. How you are going. They are actually. Genuinely. Interested. He said. This is. This group is unlike. Any other group.

That he's ever been in. And it's not about. Friendliness. This is about. Genuine. Care. And genuine love. Admonish. Encourage.

Help. Now number three. How. Should they relate. To God. The next. Two sections. Two or three sections. Will be a lot quicker.

In verse. 16 to 18. There are three instructions. On how they are to relate. To God. Not just as an individual. A believer. But as a whole community. As a church.

Together. Now. Before I go into these passages. These verses. I want you to imagine. Right now. Some officials. Barging in. Right at the back.

[22 : 12] Of your church doors. Right now. They come in. And they drag all. Your leaders. Drag them out. Beat them up. And then they come back. And point at each. And every one of you.

And says. You Christians. You better watch out. And then they leave. See. That is what happened. To the Thessalonian church. In Acts 17.

In chapter 1. Verse 6. Of 1 Thessalonians. It says. The church is experiencing. Severe suffering. So. For Paul to write.

Verses 16 to 18. For him to say. Pray continually. Yeah. That kind of makes sense. But to say. Rejoicing always. Give thanks in all circumstances.

Are you sure Paul? Are you sure? Have you forgotten the situation we're in? If anything. We have the circumstances to be unhappy. But this is joy.

[23 : 09] Joy is not the circumstances they are in. Joy is finding something more valuable. Than whatever circumstances that they are in. And that they might find themselves later on.

In chapter 1. It says that. They receive the gospel. In the midst of severe suffering. With much joy. Given by the Holy Spirit.

See. There is no grief. Or suffering. Or bitterness. So intense. That it overcomes. The God appointed. Spirit given joy. Which comes from knowing that you are forgiven.

Cleansed by the blood of Jesus. And that your destiny is heaven. See. On my wedding day. There's only one point.

In which I teared up. There's only one point. In which I teared up. I did not cry. When my wife walked down the aisle. As beautiful as she was. I did not cry. When my parents.

[24 : 07] Who raised me up. Saw me get married. I teared up. When we were singing. When we were singing. Of the wonders of Jesus.

The wonders of his death. And resurrection. Because there I stood. And it flashed back in my mind. All that Christ has done for me. I recall back.

You know. How Christ has taken me. Out of the depths of my sin. And there I stood. Holy. Blameless. Forgiven. All because of what Jesus has done.

On the cross. And how could I not. But tear up. With joy. And just thankfulness. You see. Rejoicing.

Doesn't come. By forcing. That kind of joy. Or can't just say. Just rejoice. Rejoicing comes. From reflecting. In the gospel. That.

[25 : 06] Is what we do. When we gather together. Week by week. We reflect. On the gospel of Jesus. So we rejoice. And we give thanks. And we pray. Independence.

On him. For that. For this. Is the will. For. All who are. In Christ Jesus. Says. Verse. 19. Verse 18.

Sorry. A Christian author says. There is. Greater healing. For the soul. In beholding. God's splendor. Than there is. In beholding.

Self. See. A Christian. Who rejoices. And prays. And give thanks. To God. Will not stray. Far away. From him. Now.

Number four. How to treat. God's word. How to treat. God's word. Do not. Verse 19. Starts with. Do not quench. The spirit. Now.

[26 : 03] What is the ministry. Of the spirit. We actually see it. Quite clearly. In verses. Chapter 1. Verse 5. Back in chapter 1. Verse 5. The ministry. Of the Holy Spirit. In the life of church.

Is actually to bring. God's word. To bear. In a Christian life. So verse 5. Chapter 1. Verse 5. Our God came to you. Not simply with words. But also with power.

With the Holy Spirit. And deep conviction. The gospel came. Not only in word. But in spirit. The Holy Spirit. Takes. You know. These words.

The Bible. And brings it to bear. In the life of the Christian. In a transforming. And powerful way. That's why. The next verses. Has to do with. God's word.

Verse 20. Do not treat prophecies. With contempt. But test them all. Hold on to what is good. Reject every kind of evil. Now. However you may understand.

[26 : 57] Prophecies. The main thing. Paul wants to say. Is that. Don't treat them with contempt. But test. Them all. Whether it came. From someone else. Or whether it came. From within your own thoughts.

Paul says. Test them. And how do we test prophecies? Any true prophecy. Is from the spirit. And if it's from the spirit. It will be aligned.

With the Bible. Because all of scripture. Comes from the spirit. Says 2 Peter 1 verse 21. And he doesn't contradict himself. If there are ways.

To build each other up. It is to do so. In line. With the Bible. With the word. Which is actually. The sword of the spirit. The. False prophecies.

Existed then. And. And it also exists. Still exists today. Paul says. Test everything. Make it a habit. To ask.

[27 : 52] Two questions. Firstly. If there's a prophecy. Or anything. Is there a Bible passage. To support. What it says. Is there a Bible passage.

To support. What it says. And number two. Ask the second question. Is there a Bible passage. That sounds. Different. Or contrary. To what it says. For example. Someone says.

God is coming back. On the 22nd of February. 2022. You gotta ask. Is there a passage. That supports this. No. Is there a passage.

That sounds different. 1 Thessalonians 5. The day of the Lord. Will come like a thief. In the night. No one will know. There's your answer. That prophecy. Is false.

A pastor comes up to you. And says. Hey. If you follow Jesus. And give me money. God will double your net worth. By next year. Test it. With scripture. Luke 9.

[28 : 47] 57. Someone says to Jesus. I will follow you. Wherever you go. Jesus warns. And says to him. Foxes have holes. Birds of the air have nests. But the son of man. Has nowhere.

To lay his head. You gotta ask. What does the spirit. Through his word. Says. About prophecy. Test it. Test it.

See. God's church. Need to be those. Who will hold on. To what is good. But reject. Every evil. Let us. Not be led. Astray.

That's why God's people. Need to know. God's word. The bible. So well. Know it well. Form the habit. Of asking the question. Is there a bible passage. That supports what it says.

Is there a bible passage. That is contrary. Or sounds different. God's word. Is our number one. Authority. Because it is the spirit's word. Paul says.

[29 : 41] Test everything. Finally. Number five. Hoping together. In a faithful God. Paul ends. With a closing prayer.

This is the final prayer. In verse 24. 23-24. And it's a very similar prayer. To the one in the middle. Of the book. It says. May God himself. May the God of peace. Sanctify you. Through and through. May your whole spirit.

Soul body. Be kept blameless. At the coming. Of our Lord. Jesus Christ. The one who calls you. Is faithful. He will do it. Paul prays for their holiness.

And holiness isn't just. Purity. And morality. But it actually includes. Everything we've talked about today. How we treat one another. How we love one another. It's all part of living.

The holy life. Holiness. The word. Actually just means. Being set apart. In my house. There is a cup. That is set apart.

[30 : 42] For coffee. Right. We don't use it. For anything else. Except. To make coffee. It is holy. In the plain sense. Of the word. It is different.

From all the other cups. It has a specific purpose. Like that cup. God has set us apart. To live. To live. Not for ourselves.

But to live. For him. Different. From the rest. Of the world. This is what. Holiness is. Over. And over. Again.

In Thessalonians. Paul urges them. To live in love. And holiness. Because he knows. That it is really important. To be set apart. For God. If they are going to be.

Holding on. Until the last day. But he knows. That they can't do it. With their own strength. We can't do anything. Without God. We just have to.

- [31 : 35] Admit it. We can't do it. We need. God's help. Even. Together. Team BEM coaching. Without God. Cannot stand firm. Until the end. 100%.
- When you admit that. Then you will see. Verse 24. As a great comfort. Let's look at verse 24 again. The one who calls you.
- Is faithful. He. Will do it. That doesn't mean. Let go. And let God. As if you don't have to do anything. You know. If you need to have that hard conversation.
- You. You have to take up that phone. You have to take up that phone. You have to press. Those numbers. With your own fingers. Right. But first. You have to admit. To God.
- That we need. His help. Pray first. Rely on him. And then go. And do it. But God will do it. God will do it.
- [32 : 31] Through. Each other. See. My. Growing as a Christian. Is not because of myself. Is because. So many others. Have been used by God.
- To be encouraging me. To correct me. When I'm. Walking the wrong path. And to point me to the gospel. And the forgiveness of Jesus. Time and time again.
- Christians. Christians who say. I don't need church. Need to look again. At what the Bible says. Test it. To see if that is true. In fact.
- God has saved us. Into this family. Imperfect as this. For our own good. So that we might. Stand firm. In hope together. Stand firm.
- In hope together. In hope. So church. How are we doing that? How are we standing firm. Together. In hope. Alright. There's one small step. That I may recommend. For you today.
- [33 : 28] And I thought. I'd attach an acronym to it. Just to help us remember. It's A. B. A. A. A. B. A. ABBA. Like that band. One last B. A. Admit that you need.
- God's help. That you are dependent. On Jesus' death. And resurrection. Admit that you need. God's help. B. Bow your head. And pray. Maybe before church.
- Or before small group. Or before meeting someone. Pray to God. Ask God. Please Lord. Give me the opportunity. To build them up. Give me the words to speak.
- Give me the heart. That would love them enough. To do it. Help me be intentional. And then back to A. Act. After you've.
- Admitted that you need. God's help. You've bowed your head. In prayer. Act. Strive to do what is good. Strive to do what is good. See to stand firm. In hope. You need to do it together.
- [34 : 27] Relying on God. He is faithful. He will do it. Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father.
- You called us. You appointed us. Not for wrath. But for salvation. Through the blood. Of Jesus Christ. We thank you so much. For the blood of your son.
- That sinners like us. Can be forgiven. And can have eternal life. That we hope. With a certain hope. We're sorry for many times.
- We don't actually live. Consistently. With this. Please help us. To be ready. For the day. Living as children. Of the light. Help us to do it together.
- To love each other. To respect those who lead us. Love those who need us. To rejoice. Knowing that we hope. In a faithful God. Who will do it.
- [35 : 24] Help us be a community. That even those who don't know Jesus. Will see that we are different. For the things that we live for. And for the way that we love.
- Which is out of this world. Please help us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.