

1 Thessalonians 5:12–22

The Coming of the Lord — Exhortations

Small Group Bible Study Series

Source: Dr. C Norman Sellers · SellersBibleInstitute.com

① The Text NKJV or NASB	② Devotional Heart prep · days before	③ Commentary Teacher preparation	④ Self-Study Guide Group meeting
Foundation	Personal prep	Leader / Teacher	Group together
Everyone	All group members	Teacher / Leader	Small group

① THE BIBLICAL TEXT

1 Thessalonians 5:12–22 (NKJV)

12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

16 Rejoice always,

17 pray without ceasing,

18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

19 Do not quench the Spirit.

20 Do not despise prophecies.

21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

22 Abstain from every form of evil.

② DEVOTIONAL

Read this before the group meets · approximately 1 minute

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” — 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

People spend a great deal of energy wondering about God's will for their lives — and Paul answers the question in three short commands. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in everything. This is not the partial will of God, or the spiritual warm-up before the real answer. This is it. If you want to know what God wants from your Tuesday morning, these three verses have it.

Notice that Paul does not say wait for the right feeling before you rejoice, or pray when you have something important enough to bring, or give thanks when things are going well. He says always. Without ceasing. In everything. The standard is higher than mood or circumstance — which is exactly what makes it possible in every mood and circumstance. The King is always in residence. The flag can always be up.

These are not three separate disciplines to master one at a time. They belong together: the joy makes you want to pray, the prayer produces gratitude, and the gratitude fuels the joy. What Paul is describing is not a spiritual to-do list — it is a way of being present with God through an ordinary day. That is available to you today, right where you are.

For Reflection:

- Of the three — rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks — which one is hardest for you to sustain through an ordinary week, and why?
- Is there a current circumstance in your life in which you are finding it difficult to give thanks? What would it look like to thank God in it — not for it, but in it?
- Where have you been saying no to the Spirit — in your personal life or in the life of your church — that you know you need to change to a yes?

Go this week not waiting for the right conditions to rejoice — the King is already in residence.

③ COMMENTARY — Sermon Outline with Notes

Teacher preparation resource · Full text organized under outline headings

While the coming of the Lord thrills the soul, obeying the Lord fills it — and Paul's closing exhortations show us exactly what that obedience looks like in the church, in leadership, and in every individual life.

Introduction

Paul has been telling these people about the future blessing, about the coming of the Lord — the sweet by-and-by. It is going to be beautiful, wonderful — out of this world, you might say. But now he is going to bring them back to the present realities, to the nasty now-and-now. This world is where you are. This is where you live. There is work to be done, there are souls to be saved, believers to be discipled and encouraged, and a church to be established for those who come after us. If the Lord tarries, all of that is necessary. Rejoice that the Lord is coming — get that in your mind, use it, think on it, pray for it. But remember: we still live here.

Paul gives instructions in three areas: instructions to those who are being led, instructions to those who lead, and instructions to all for Christian living.

I. Instructions to Those Who Are Led — 5:12–13

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”

These leaders are in all likelihood the elders of the church. Before Paul left, he established elders wherever he planted churches. Whether they were officially recognized or not, these men had been left with the responsibility of leading.

A. Recognize the Rulers — 5:12

The word recognize (*oida*) means simply to know — to get to know your leaders for who they are and what they do. Paul identifies three marks of a good leader, and these three are still exactly what we look for in good church leaders today:

1. They Toil — κοπιᾶω

The word toil is hard work — the kind that makes you weary and tired. These were not professional preachers sitting in an office all day. They worked their regular jobs from sunup to sundown, and then they did their church work on top of that. They performed their service before or after a full day of labor — and they performed it well.

2. They Take Charge

They ‘stand before you’ — they are the ones out front. They lead worship, service, the life of the church. They do not lead from behind. Good leaders don't hide. They lead from out front.

3. They Train

'In the Lord' — in a truly Christian way. They are training the people of the church to do the work of the Lord. Toil, take charge, and train — these are still the marks of a good pastor, a good elder, a good leader in any church.

B. Esteem Them Highly — 5:13a

"...esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."

It is not enough to know who your leaders are. Esteem them — hold them in the highest regard. The word is the same word used in James 1:2: 'Count it all joy.' Count them as worthy. And this must be done in an attitude of agapē love — the highest, most selfless love. If you don't have that kind of love, ask God for it. James says that if you lack wisdom, ask God — He gives to all liberally and does not scold you for asking. It is the same with love.

And do it for their work's sake. You don't have to like the way a pastor combs his hair. You don't have to like the car he drives or the way he drives it. Esteem him highly for his office and for his performance of that office. That is the standard. Not personality — faithfulness.

C. Be at Peace among Yourselves — 5:13b

"Be at peace among yourselves."

Notice the precise wording: maintain peace, not start peace. The Thessalonian church already had peace — they just needed to continue in it. You cannot maintain what you do not already have.

These instructions work. Thessalonica was probably one of the finest churches Paul ever planted. It worked for them. It will work for any church that follows them.

II. Instructions to Those Who Lead — 5:14–15

"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."

These instructions are terse, short, and packed. We have to keep them in context to grasp what Paul is saying — because each brief phrase opens into a whole category of pastoral work.

A. Help These People — 5:14

1. Warn Those Who Are Disorderly

The word unruly or disorderly means: undisciplined, insubordinate, idle, lazy — people who are out of line. Paul uses battle language throughout this letter, and the picture here is of soldiers who have broken rank — some getting too far ahead, some falling dangerously behind. Neither helps the army.

The specific issue in Thessalonica was probably idleness rooted in eschatology. Some people apparently drew the logical-seeming conclusion: if the Lord is coming next week, I can sit down, stop working, and my money will last until then. Second Thessalonians 3:6–8 makes this explicit: Paul commands them to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not

according to the tradition they received. He defines disorderly as refusing to work — ‘nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.’ That is the model. Warn those who have departed from it.

2. Comfort Those Who Are Despondent

‘Comfort the fainthearted’ — literally, the little-souled. Some of these were most likely the people whose relatives had died and who feared their loved ones had missed the rapture. Paul addressed that in 4:18 and 5:11 — comfort those people with the words of the resurrection. But there is probably a wider group here: those who needed courage to face the affliction coming on the church from the outside. Whatever the source of the little soul — fear, grief, intimidation — the call to leaders is the same: come alongside them with comfort.

3. Uphold Those Who Are Dependent

‘Uphold the weak’ — this weakness is probably not physical but moral or spiritual. These are people who are struggling under the weight of sin, temptation, or spiritual immaturity. Don't throw them out. Don't dismiss them. Give them the upholding they need — bear them up, hold them steady. That is why they need the arm of the church around them.

4. Be Patient with Those Who Are Different

‘Be patient with all.’ Some people hang back — they're not with the crowd, not fully in step. Be long-suffering with them. Be as patient with others as God has been with you. The word ‘all’ is general enough to reach even unbelievers — people who misunderstand the gospel and misunderstand your interest in them. Be patient with them too.

B. Hold These Principles — 5:15

1. Prohibit This — 5:15a

“See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone.”

Three levels of response to wrongdoing — and Paul is explicit about which one is required:

- Evil for evil — that is human. Somebody cuts you off in traffic, you cut them off.
- Evil for good — that is devilish. Someone does you good and you do them evil in return.
- Good for evil — that is divine. That is where we must be.

Don't operate on the human level. Certainly don't operate on the devilish level. Operate on the divine level with believers, unbelievers, anyone. As Jesus pointed out, it heaps coals of fire on their head. It shocks people. It changes them. Retaliation is simply not an option.

2. Pursue This — 5:15b

“...always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”

It is not enough to merely avoid evil. Pursue the good. Go after it. The word pursue means you are actively hunting something down. Not if I get around to it. Not if I feel like it. Not once in a while. Always, for everyone else as much as for yourself.

III. Instructions to the Entire Church — 5:16–22

Everyone wakes up now. These eight instructions — the final seven verses — are addressed to the whole body.

A. Always Praise — 5:16

“Rejoice always.”

This is the shortest verse in the New Testament Greek — just fourteen letters. ‘Jesus wept’ (John 11:35) is the shortest in English at sixteen letters, but this wins in Greek. Short — but packed.

When the wise men saw the star, they rejoiced (Matt. 2:10). The believer should and can rejoice in spite of meanness and persecution around him. One time the disciples came back to Jesus thrilled — the demons are subject to us! He said: Rejoice rather that your names are written in the book of life. Rejoicing in your salvation is greater than rejoicing in anything else God does through you.

We are told over and over to rejoice, and yet so many little things get in and lessen our joy — or darken it altogether. In England they fly the royal flag over the palace when the king or queen is in residence. Joy is the Christian's flag. When it is flying, the King is present — the King is in residence. And it also indicates that this believer is living in the realm of faith, trusting God.

B. Without Ceasing, Pray — 5:17

“pray without ceasing.”

Does that mean twenty-four hours a day without stopping? Jesus did not do that. Paul did not do that. But Paul did maintain stated times of prayer. Daniel prayed three times a day with his window open toward Jerusalem. When it was made illegal to pray, he did not reduce to two times, and he did not close the window. He did exactly what he always did.

The Greek word *adialeptōs* — without ceasing — is used of a person with a hacking cough. He does not cough every single second without stopping. He coughs throughout the day. That is the picture of praying without ceasing.

Two friends can walk together and simply be in fellowship without every moment being formal conversation. There are stated times of prayer with specific requests. There is prayer with family, with a friend, with the church. And then throughout the day we stay in touch with our heavenly Father. That is the kind of praying Paul is describing here.

C. In All Things, Appreciate — 5:18

“...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

He does not say for everything — though he does say that in Ephesians 5:20. Here it is in everything. In every circumstance of life, no matter where God puts you, no matter what the difficulties are, you can thank God for what He has already done for you. You may be praying with everything you have for Him to change your circumstances. But you can thank God all the while — because in it all, you will be victorious in Christ.

What is God's will for my life? The answer: right here. Three components — three consecutive verses — and Paul says explicitly: this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in everything. Start there.

D. Do Not Quench the Spirit — 5:19

“Do not quench the Spirit.”

When Christ went to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, every believer in Christ was indwelt by the Spirit. Ever since, when a person trusts in Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit baptizes him into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and comes into his mortal body (1 Cor. 6:19). He is there to teach, to guide, to direct, to convict, to show the way into the Scriptures.

To quench is to throw water on a fire — to extinguish it. You know the kind of Christian who seems saved, but whose life carries no fragrance of God's presence? They are resisting the Holy Spirit — either in their own life or in the life of the church at large. The simplest and most accurate definition of quenching the Spirit is: saying no to God. Say yes to the Lord. Stop saying no. In saying yes, we stop quenching the Spirit.

E. Do Not Despise Prophecies — 5:20

“Do not despise prophecies.”

In the early church, before the complete Scriptures were written, God spoke to the church through men who had the gift of prophecy. But how did you know if the prophet was delivering the word correctly? First Corinthians 14:29: let one speak, and let the others judge. There was a built-in check — prophecy from one prophet was evaluated against the word held by the others. Now we have the completed Scriptures, so the gift is no longer being given in that sense.

F. Test All Things — 5:21a

“Test all things.”

In Paul's day: listen to the prophet, then test what he said against the word you already have or against the testimony of other prophets. Today: test everything a teacher says by the written Word of God. Anything taught in a church ought to be something the teacher can explain from Scripture to the student's satisfaction. That is the accountability that keeps teaching honest.

G. Hold Fast to the Good — 5:21b

“Hold fast what is good.”

Once you have tested it and found it to be true — hold on. Don't let it slip. The good, once identified, is worth gripping. Tested truth is the treasure of the church.

H. Abstain from Every Form of Evil — 5:22

“Abstain from every form of evil.”

In context Paul is talking about evil doctrine — but he includes all forms of evil, and the instruction reaches beyond doctrine. Billy Graham had a personal rule: he would not get into an elevator alone with a woman who was not his wife. He was abstaining from even the

appearance of what could become a scandal — and in a life of decades of public ministry, it held.

The word 'appearance' here is sometimes misread. It does not mean everything that looks like evil to somebody else — or everything some person might think is evil. The meaning is: every form that evil actually takes — in all its variations — keep away from it. Not everything that looks odd. Actual evil, in all its forms. Abstain from it. Keep away. That is the command.

Conclusion

The coming of the Lord thrills our souls. Paul has given us that — the rapture, the blessed hope, the glorious appearing. But obeying the Lord fills our souls. These closing exhortations are not a letdown after the heights of prophecy — they are the proof of whether we actually believe what we have heard. May the Lord enable us to obey these commands as we wait for His coming.

Lord, thank You.

④ SELF-STUDY GUIDE

For use during the group meeting · Focused on the commentary text

Greek Word Study

Grammar and parsing per Blue Letter Bible. Sources cited selectively — only where a source most clearly establishes the word's meaning and significance in this verse.

Verse	Greek Word (Lexical Form) / English Translation	Strong's # / Transliteration / Grammatical Form	Definition & Significance
v. 12	οἶδα to recognize	G1492 eidenai Perf. Inf. Act. (present force)	STR: To know, to perceive, to recognize. THAY: Thayer distinguishes this from surface acquaintance — the perfect form denotes a settled, full knowledge already possessed, not a knowledge still being formed. Significance: Not merely head-knowledge but the full, personal recognition of someone for who they are. Paul calls the congregation to genuinely know their leaders — their character, their labor, their authority.
v. 12	κοπιᾶω labor	G2872 kopiōntas Pres. Ptc. Act. Acc. Pl. Masc.	STR: To labor to the point of weariness, to toil. VINE: The same word describes Paul's own ministry labor elsewhere (1 Cor. 15:10; Col. 1:29) — cross-passage usage shows this is the vocabulary of exhausting, self-spending effort, not routine duty. Significance: These leaders are giving themselves out for the church, not performing a professional obligation.
v. 12	προΐστημι are over you	G4291 proistamenous Pres. Ptc. Mid. Acc. Pl. Masc.	STR: To stand before, to lead, to protect. VINE: Used of household leadership as well as church eldership (1 Tim. 3:4–5) — cross-passage usage links the qualification for the two, describing protective, out-front leadership rather than managerial oversight. Significance: Describes the leader who goes ahead of the people rather than managing from behind.
v. 13	ἡγέομαι esteem	G2233 hēgeisthai Pres. Inf. Mid./Dep.	STR: To esteem, consider, reckon as worthy. VINE: The same word appears in James 1:2 ('count it all joy') — cross-passage usage confirms this is a deliberate, active assessment, not a passive feeling. Significance: A deliberate decision to regard the leader as worthy of the highest respect — grounded in their work, not their personality.

v. 14	ἄτακτος unruly	G813 ataktous Acc. Pl. Masc.	STR: Disorderly, out of rank, undisciplined. MRV: A military term in secular Greek for a soldier who has broken formation — Vincent's background note sharpens the picture of irresponsibility rather than outright rebellion. Significance: In Thessalonica, those who had stopped working in expectation of the rapture — stepping out of one's place and burdening others.
v. 14	ὀλιγόψυχος fainthearted	G3642 oligopsychous Acc. Pl. Masc.	STR: Fainthearted, little-souled — from oligos (little/few) + psychē (soul). THAY: Thayer notes this rare compound describes a shrinking of courage or capacity under pressure, distinct from unbelief or moral weakness. Significance: Those whose courage has shrunk under the weight of grief, fear, or affliction. They need comfort, not correction.
v. 17	ἀδιαλείπτως without ceasing	G89 adialeiptōs Adverb	STR: Without ceasing, uninterruptedly. MRV: Used elsewhere of a persistent, recurring action — like a hacking cough that recurs throughout the day rather than stopping and starting — a vivid classical-style usage note matching the word's everyday force. Significance: The standard for prayer is not constant vocalization but constant orientation — staying in touch with God throughout the day.
v. 16	χαίρω rejoice	G5463 chairete Pres. Imp. Act. 2nd Pl.	STR: To rejoice, be glad. ATR: The present imperative marks a standing command, not a one-time instruction — grammatically this is an ongoing, active state to be maintained, not a single burst of feeling. Significance: Not occasional bursts of happiness, but a sustained posture of joy rooted in who God is and what He has done.
v. 19	σβέννυμι quench	G4570 sbennyte Pres. Imp. Act. 2nd Pl. (negated)	STR: To quench, extinguish — the image of fire suppressed by water. LXX: Fire consistently symbolizes God's own presence and activity in the Greek OT (the burning bush, the pillar of fire) — background that stands behind the NT's fire imagery for the Spirit (Acts 2). Significance: To quench is to resist the Spirit's working — either in personal obedience or in the life of the local church. The antidote is not effort but surrender.
v. 21	δοκιμάζω test	G1381 dokimazete Pres. Imp. Act. 2nd Pl.	STR: To test, prove, examine and approve. VINE: The same metallurgist's word Paul uses of his own tested integrity in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 — cross-passage usage within this letter ties the

			standard applied to teaching to the standard Paul claimed for himself. Significance: Applied here to teaching: put it to the fire of the Word. What survives is pure; hold fast to it. What does not — reject.
v. 22	εἶδος form	G1491 eidous Gen. Sg. Neut.	STR: Form, kind, appearance, visible shape. THAY: Thayer distinguishes this from mere subjective resemblance — the word denotes an actual, visible manifestation of something, not merely how a thing might strike an observer. Significance: Every actual manifestation of evil in all its varieties, not everything that merely looks suspicious to someone. The command is comprehensive: wherever evil actually shows up, keep away.

Grammar Abbreviation Key

Category	Abbreviations
Cases (Nouns / Adjectives)	Nom. (Nominative) · Gen. (Genitive) · Dat. (Dative) · Acc. (Accusative) · Voc. (Vocative)
Number	Sg. (Singular) · Pl. (Plural)
Gender	Masc. (Masculine) · Fem. (Feminine) · Neut. (Neuter)
Verb Mood	Ind. (Indicative) · Imp. (Imperative) · Subj. (Subjunctive) · Opt. (Optative) · Inf. (Infinitive) · Ptc. (Participle)
Verb Tense	Pres. (Present) · Imperf. (Imperfect) · Fut. (Future) · Aor. (Aorist) · Perf. (Perfect) · Plpf. (Pluperfect)
Verb Voice	Act. (Active) · Mid. (Middle) · Pass. (Passive)
Verb Person / Number	1st Sg. / 1st Pl. · 2nd Sg. / 2nd Pl. · 3rd Sg. / 3rd Pl.

Study Questions

Part 1 — From the Commentary

Review the outline as a group before moving to the discussion questions.

Outline Point (Commentary)	Commentary Summary
I — Instructions to Those Who Are Led (5:12–13)	Know, esteem, and be at peace with those who lead — toil, take charge, and train are the marks of good leaders.
II — Instructions to Those Who Lead (5:14–15)	
III — Instructions to the Entire Church (5:16–22)	

Part 2 — Study Questions

Leader answer boxes are drawn from the Commentary and Greek Word Study above.

1. Paul uses three verbs to describe the leaders' work: toil (*kopiaō*), stand before (*proistēmi*), and train (in the Lord). What does each of these demand from a leader personally? How do the three together form a complete picture of church leadership?

Leader Answer:

Kopiaō demands self-spending effort — labor to the point of weariness. *Proistēmi* demands protective, out-front presence — leading rather than managing from behind. Training in the Lord demands teaching character, not just information. Together they picture a leader who works hard, leads visibly, and shapes people — not merely one who occupies an office.

2. Verse 14 addresses four different kinds of people who need different responses: the disorderly, the fainthearted, the weak, and those who are different. What does it tell us about pastoral ministry that the same response does not work for all four groups?

Leader Answer:

Pastoral care requires discernment, not a single formula. The disorderly need a warning; the fainthearted need comfort; the weak need upholding; those who are different need patience. Applying warning to the fainthearted would crush them; applying comfort to the disorderly would enable them. Good leadership diagnoses before it responds.

3. Paul sets out three levels of response in verse 15: evil for evil (human), evil for good (devilish), and good for evil (divine). Why does returning evil for evil place us at the human level — not the divine one? What makes the divine response both possible and necessary for a believer?

Leader Answer:

Evil for evil is simply natural instinct — anyone, believer or not, retaliates. It requires no grace. Good for evil is only possible because of grace already received; it mirrors how God treated us in Christ (Rom. 5:8). It is necessary because believers are called to reflect God's own character, not merely to avoid the worst human impulse.

4. Verses 16–18 form a unit and Paul says explicitly: 'this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.' What does it mean that rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks are presented as the will of God — not as optional spiritual disciplines, but as God's stated desire? How does this change how you approach those three things?

Leader Answer:

These are not preliminary steps toward discovering some hidden, more specific will of God — they are the will of God, stated plainly. That reframes the search for God's will: instead of waiting for guidance on decisions, believers already have a clear, present assignment. It also means these three are commanded regardless of circumstance, not contingent on favorable conditions.

5. The Greek word *sbennymi* (quench, v.19) and *dokimazō* (test, v.21) appear to be in tension — don't suppress the Spirit, but test everything. How do these two commands work together rather than against each other? What does the balance look like in a local church?

Leader Answer:

Quenching the Spirit means resisting genuine promptings; testing means not accepting every claim of spiritual authority uncritically. Held together, the church stays open to the Spirit's work while remaining accountable to the Word. The balance in practice looks like welcoming gifts and initiative while measuring every teaching and claim against Scripture before embracing it.

Part 3 — Passage Summary

Review the table as a group to see the whole passage at a glance.

Verse	Key Truth	Key Greek Term(s)
5:12–13a	Know, esteem, and honor leaders for their toil, out-front leadership, and training	Oida · Kopiaō · Proistēmi
5:13b	Maintain the peace the church already has	—
5:14a–d	Warn the disorderly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all	Ataktous · Oligopsychous
5:15a–b	Never return evil for evil; always pursue good for all	—
5:16–18	Rejoice, pray, and give thanks always — this is God's stated will	Chairete · Adialeiptōs
5:19–20	Do not quench the Spirit or despise prophecy	Sbennymi
5:21–22	Test everything, hold fast the good, abstain from every form of evil	Dokimazō · Eidos

⑤ APPLICATION

Application 1 — Know, Esteem, and Honor Your Leaders

Scripture Anchor: 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 — “...recognize those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.”

Source: Commentary §I.A–B (Recognize the Rulers; Esteem Them Highly) and Greek Word Study — οἶδα, κοπιᾶω, ἡγέομαι

The congregation's posture toward its leaders shapes the health of the entire church. Paul does not ask the led to agree with everything or to suppress concerns — he asks for three things: genuine knowledge of the leaders (get to know them and what they do), genuine esteem for them (hold them in the highest regard, in agapē love), and peace with each other as the result. The ground for esteem is not personality but faithful performance of the office. And if the love required for that is not naturally there — ask God for it. He gives it liberally.

Personal Reflection: Do you actually know what your pastor or elders do — what their week looks like, what they carry, what they sacrifice? And do you actively esteem them, or simply tolerate them? What would it take to move from tolerance to genuine honor?

Practical Step: This week, do one thing to honor a leader in your church — not in a formal way, but personally. Write a note, send a message, or express verbally what their faithfulness has meant to you. Make it specific: name what they do and why it matters.

For further study on the character and training of a leader who toils, leads visibly, and trains others, see Howard G. Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Proven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1987) — FGR Category ⑦.

Application 2 — Return Good for Evil, Every Time

Scripture Anchor: 1 Thessalonians 5:15 — “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”

Source: Commentary §II.B (Hold These Principles)

Paul leaves no middle ground here. The human response to wrong is retaliation. The devilish response is returning evil for good. The divine response — the one required of every believer — is returning good for evil. Not occasionally. Always. And not just restraining the evil response — actively pursuing the good one. Jesus said it heaps coals of fire on the offender's head (Rom. 12:20). It shocks people out of their patterns. It is also costly, which is why it requires the divine level of grace rather than the human level of willpower.

Personal Reflection: Where in your current relationships are you most tempted to render evil for evil — to retaliate, to withhold, to give someone what you feel they deserve? What would returning good for evil look like in that specific situation?

Practical Step: Identify one person who has wronged you — recently or over time — toward whom you have been withholding good. This week, do one specific, unrequested good thing for them. Do not tell anyone you did it. Notice what it costs you and what it produces.

Application 3 — Live the Will of God: Rejoice, Pray, Give Thanks

Scripture Anchor: 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 — “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Source: Commentary §III.A–C (Always Praise; Without Ceasing, Pray; In All Things, Appreciate)

Christians spend enormous energy searching for God's will for their lives — and here Paul states three components of it explicitly and without qualification. These are not preliminary to the real answer. They are the answer: rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in everything. The joy is not dependent on circumstances. The prayer is not reserved for crises. The gratitude is not conditional on outcomes. Together they describe a life in which the King is continuously in residence.

Personal Reflection: Which of the three do you most consistently neglect — and which do you most consistently practice? What is the circumstance in your life right now where giving thanks is hardest — and what would it mean to begin doing it anyway?

Practical Step: For the next seven days, begin each morning with these three: one sentence of rejoicing (name one reason to be glad in God today), one minute of prayer (bring one specific request), and one expression of thanks (name one thing God has done that you would have missed without Him). Keep it simple. Keep it daily. Notice what seven days of it produces.

Application 4 — Do Not Quench the Spirit: Say Yes

Scripture Anchor: 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22 — “Do not quench the Spirit... Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

Source: Commentary §III.D–H (Do Not Quench the Spirit through Abstain from Every Form of Evil) and Greek Word Study — σβέννυμι, δοκιμάζω

The Holy Spirit is already at work — in your life and in your church. He is teaching, guiding, convicting, and moving. The most common way we suppress His work is the simplest one: we say no. We resist the prompt to speak. We hold back the gift. Paul's antidote is equally simple: say yes. At the same time, he commands us to test everything by the Word — not every impression, every feeling, or every confident claim to spiritual authority is the Spirit. The balance is: stay open, stay accountable, hold fast what is genuinely good, keep clear of what is genuinely evil.

Corporate Reflection: As a group, where have you — individually or collectively — been quenching the Spirit by saying no to something He has been calling you toward? Where has the church been suppressing a gift, a call, or an act of obedience out of comfort, tradition, or fear?

Practical Step: As a group, name one area where you sense the Spirit has been saying yes and you have been saying not yet. Commit to one concrete step of obedience in that direction before your next group meeting. Assign someone to follow up.

End of Study · 1 Thessalonians 5:12–22