

SESSION 8

peace-filled hearts

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

1 Thess. 5:12–28

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God enables believers to have peace with each other and in their hearts.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The student will determine ways to promote peace with others and with God.

MEMORY VERSE

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

Teacher Preparation

- ❑ Which relationships in your life could use a little more peace? Paul's final instructions in his first letter to the Thessalonians consisted almost entirely of commands related to peaceful relationships. Clearly, he considered keeping peace an important element of living for Christ while waiting for His return.
- ❑ As you read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–28, note each specific command Paul gave and pause to consider how that command would promote peace in your own relationships with others (5:12–15) and in your heart (5:16–22). Notice that the key to true peace is found in submitting ourselves to God, the source of peace (5:23).
- ❑ Everyone faces conflicts with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. And everyone struggles to find peace within. This session emphasizes that God is the giver of true relational and personal peace.

Session Summary

Interpersonal peace begins with love and respect for spiritual leaders. It is strengthened through loving and patient ministry to fellow believers, including the unruly and the spiritually weak. Paul commanded the Thessalonian believers to do good to all people, even to those who mistreated them. Personal peace comes as believers trust God's leading and Word. Paul warned the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit's influence but to listen to God's Word and test everything else against it. Personal peace also comes as believers trust God's sanctifying power in their lives and learn to love God's people. Paul closed by underscoring the importance of reading God's Word.

Session Starters

Option 1—Unrest in the News

Gather

- Access to recent world headlines.

Steps

1. Read several world headlines that have to do with peace or the lack thereof.

ASK: How do headlines about unrest in the world affect your sense of peace? (Q1)

The overwhelming majority of news headlines are negative. That's both a symptom of society and by design. Negative news stories generate more interest than positive news stories. Writers put negative words in headlines on purpose. After all, the greater the interest in a story, the more clicks and revenue it will generate.

ASK: Do you find yourself clicking on negative headlines more than positive headlines? Why? (Q2)

2. Transition to the Bible study.

Headlines coming out of Thessalonica weren't positive or encouraging for believers. But that didn't mean they couldn't experience peace. Despite the difficulties and serious threats, God had a plan for the Thessalonians to experience peace in their relationships and in their hearts. Paul laid out God's instructions. His teaching applies to us too. This session lays out God's strategy for knowing peace even when our circumstances are chaotic.

Option 2—Revenge Is . . .

Gather

- Paper and pencils.

Steps

1. Write the following on the board: Revenge is . . .
2. Give students a few minutes to think how they would finish the sentence starter. They could either come up with a word or two that describes revenge, or they could give an illustration of someone getting revenge.
3. Students share the answers and discuss getting revenge.

ASK: When have you been highly motivated to get revenge? What did you do?

ASK: When has someone gotten revenge against you?

ASK: What does getting revenge do to your relationship problems?

4. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul gave the Thessalonians a lot of praise, but he knew they weren't perfect. If they weren't careful, they could ruin their testimony by failing to live at peace with one another. Paul gave them instructions on interpersonal and personal peace. His instructions, the topic of this session, apply to our lives today. As believers we can know peace in our relationships and in our hearts.

Bible Study

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians encouraged the believers to continue in their faith. Reminders of Christ's return and the accompanying events offered them hope during a time of persecution, and Paul's practical instruction gave them guidance in how to live as they waited for the Day of the Lord. In closing his letter, Paul focused on both interpersonal and personal peace. God provides for both.

I. Instructions for Interpersonal Peace (1 Thess. 5:12–22)

Interpersonal peace is peace between two people or groups of people. Paul gave God's instructions for gaining and maintaining peace with fellow believers, especially those in the same church.

A. Love God's leaders (5:12, 13)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:12.

Paul instructed the Thessalonians to respect their spiritual leaders and to acknowledge their hard work on behalf of the church. The leaders carried out their God-given ministry to guide the members in spiritual matters. At times, they admonished believers in the church, warning them about their sinful attitudes and actions. That wasn't easy to do because some church members don't want to hear warnings about their attitudes and actions.

ASK: What sinful reactions might believers have when their pastor warns them about sin in their lives? (Q3) *They might become defensive and defiant; they could seek to get revenge by starting rumors about the pastor; they could get mad and leave the church.*

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:13.

The Thessalonian spiritual leaders were faithfully doing the Lord's work, so Paul called the Thessalonian church members to "esteem" them very highly. He meant the Thessalonians were to regard their leaders

more highly than expected. Believers are to recognize that their spiritual leaders are critical to their spiritual success, and they are to love their spiritual leaders for challenging them in their walk with the Lord.

ASK: How can you show respect and love for our pastor(s), teachers, and other spiritual leaders? (Q4) *Listen to their instruction; seek their wisdom; pray for them; talk them up in the church; care for them when they have needs.*

ASK: Why does respect for church leaders help maintain peace within the church? (Q5) *Respect for church leaders comes from respect for Christ's leadership. Believers who respect Christ's leadership will seek peace with fellow believers.*

B. Support fellow believers (5:14)

Paul urged the Thessalonians to maintain peace with their fellow believers. Recognizing needs and ministering to each other would help ease tensions within the church.

1. Warn the unruly (5:14)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

Church members Paul described as unruly or idle were likely those who refused to work. Because they thought Christ was returning soon, they were depending on others in the church for financial support instead of earning their own money. Paul had already encouraged the idle believers to stay busy working and supporting themselves (4:11, 12). He went further and encouraged other believers to warn these people about their sinful conduct.

Elsewhere Paul wrote that believers who seek to restore sinning believers need to do so with an attitude of humility (Gal. 6:1). Those believers also need to be spiritual, meaning they should be led by the Spirit.

ASK: Why should church members be concerned about how other church members are living? (Q6) *The church is carrying out the mission to make disciples. Warning the unruly is part of that mission.*

2. Uphold the weary (5:14)

Some Thessalonian believers needed help because they felt spiritually feeble or faint. They were probably discouraged by persecution (3:3, 4) or by their grief over loved ones who had died (4:13). Perhaps some of the believers were struggling with a sin or temptation and had fallen out of fellowship with the church. Whatever the difficulties, Paul called other believers to comfort them with encouraging words, seek them out, and draw them back into fellowship.

Paul also encouraged the believers to support those who were spiritually weak and immature. These people were struggling to trust God completely. They might have still been trying to live by rules and traditions rather than by faith and in the freedom offered by Christ. The spiritually weak may have had fears about the future or doubted God and His promises. Rather than criticizing the weak or dismissing their concerns, stronger believers should hold them up and strengthen them spiritually.

ASK: Think of a time when you felt spiritually discouraged or weak. When or how were you comforted or strengthened by another believer? (Q7)

Paul concluded verse 14 with a call to patience. Ministry to others, whether to believers or unbelievers, requires patience. In any situation, when we lose our patience with people, we hurt them and our testimony. Losing patience might mean getting easily frustrated or annoyed with someone, getting too quickly angered, or giving up on someone. Ministering with patience promotes peace.

C. Pursue good with all people (5:15)

Seeking peace with those who have mistreated us is difficult but Biblical. We naturally want to get even.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

ASK: How do you respond when the main character in a movie or book gets revenge on the villain? (Q8)

It's often satisfying when a "good guy" in a story strikes back at a "bad guy." It seems fair, doesn't it? But Scripture teaches us a different way to live. Note that seeking revenge is a different issue from defending yourself against attackers. It is Biblical to defend yourself and others from harm. But it is clearly not Biblical to seek out personal revenge.

READ: Romans 12:19–21. **ASK:** What does God say about getting revenge? (Q9) *Vengeance belongs to Him not to us. He promises to bring about justice. God wants us to treat our enemies with kindness.*

Overcoming evil with good means showing kindness to evildoers, which may help lead them to repentance. This way of living follows the example of Christ, Who never even threatened those who reviled Him or treated Him unjustly (1 Pet. 2:23).

II. Instructions for Personal Peace (1 Thess. 5:16–26)

Paul outlined some key points for maintaining peaceful hearts and minds.

A. Trust God's leading (5:16–18)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

If the command to rejoice always sounds difficult to you, imagine how difficult it must have sounded to those early Christians under persecution! Regardless of life's circumstances, we can maintain joy in our hearts for what Christ has done for us. In life we will inevitably experience such feelings as grief, fear, and anxiety, but we can always depend on God to sustain us through all difficulties. We must, however, trust God's leading in our lives. To trust God's leading means to accept the circumstances He has allowed in our lives.

ASK: Why can we always trust God's leading? (Q10) *God loves us and always acts according to His goodness.*

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Paul called on the Thessalonians to maintain an attitude of prayer. In other words, always be aware of God's presence in your life. Be willing to ask for strength, forgiveness, encouragement, and comfort. With Jesus as our Mediator, we can go to the Father at any time and in any place. Believers can feel free to pray about all things. We certainly should keep our set times for prayer and devotion, but we should maintain that connection to God throughout the day by keeping the lines of communication open.

ASK: When do you find it difficult to pray? (Q11)

Even when we don't know exactly what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us, praying to the Father on our behalf (Rom. 8:26).

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Paul didn't say we are to give thanks *for* all things or circumstances. Obviously, we do not give thanks for all the sin, evil, and tragedy in the world. Rather, Paul instructed believers to give thanks *in* all things. In all circumstances of life, we can still find reasons to give thanks to God. We can trust God to work through all situations to bring blessings to our lives (Rom. 8:28). When we do, we will find personal peace.

B. Trust God's Word (5:19–22)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

ASK: How can a fire be quenched? (Q12) *With wind, water, or some other substance. By letting the fire burn out on its own.*

One way to quench the Holy Spirit's fire in us is to neglect the fuel of His Word. When we stop listening to the preaching and teaching of the Word, we are cutting off a major line of communication with God. The Spirit will not leave us, but we can certainly hinder His work in our lives, which weakens our relationship with Him.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

The prophecies in verse 20 refer to preaching of the Scripture and to interpretation and application of Scripture. The Thessalonians may have been quenching the Spirit by “despising” prophecies. In other words, they were not listening to the proclamation of God’s Word or accepting the teachings of their ministers. God’s Word brings peace as we faithfully learn and apply it.

ASK: What other things might quench the Spirit in our lives? (Q13)
Willful sin, giving too much attention to worldly pursuits, neglecting prayer or corporate worship.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

As the Thessalonians listened to preaching and teaching, they were to prove, or test, it against Scripture. All believers have the responsibility to study the Bible for themselves to discern the truth of others’ words. Then we must hold on to what is good. The word “good” here means “genuine.” If the words we hear or read match the truth found in Scripture, then we can accept them as words to remember and apply to life.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

When words or actions are tested against Scripture and found to be morally evil, believers are called to reject them. As believers listen and respond to God’s Word, they will desire to stay away from all forms of evil.

C. Trust God’s power (5:23–25)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24.

Paul knew it was impossible for the believers to follow all his instructions for peace through their own strength. So, he prayed that God, the source of peace, would sanctify them completely. Paul wanted God to continue His work in the Thessalonians so that every part of them would be set apart for God’s use. God would continue to purify them until He made them blameless at Christ’s return.

As the Thessalonians trusted the Lord to work in their lives, the result would be peace among the believers and between the believers and God. God’s power gives us peace that goes beyond understanding (Phil. 4:6, 7).

Paul declared that God would be faithful to accomplish His work in the Thessalonians’ lives (1 Thess. 5:24). He will glorify all believers one day, completely sanctifying them.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:25.

Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for him and his coworkers, Silas and Timothy. Paul was always aware of his weakness and often requested prayer from fellow believers. Ministers are subject to

discouragement, temptations, and other trials, just as we all are. They need God's transforming power in their lives too.

D. Love God's people (5:26)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:26.

The "holy kiss" was a sign of Christian love and fellowship that became a custom in the early church. It was also called a "kiss of charity" (1 Pet. 5:14) and came to signify peace. Paul expected all believers to be greeted with the holy kiss. As believers show love for one another, they will experience personal peace. Those who hold grudges or hold on to hurts will know constant turmoil in their hearts.

III. Instructions from the Prince of Peace (1 Thess. 5:27, 28)

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:27, 28.

Paul charged all the Thessalonians to make sure his letter would be read aloud publicly to the entire congregation. Probably some in the congregation could not read. And since Paul had been prevented from preaching to them further, it was highly important that all the believers receive the instruction given in the letter.

The book of 1 Thessalonians came ultimately from Christ. As the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), Jesus knows all about what it takes to have peaceful relationships and have peaceful hearts. We can't find peace apart from His instructions in books like 1 Thessalonians.

ASK: How have instructions from the Prince of Peace helped you know peace in your relationships and in your heart? (Q14)

Paul ended with a blessing of the Lord's grace upon the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:28). It is only by His grace that believers might live at peace as they wait for Christ's return.

Session Application

Gather

- Paper and pencils.

Steps

1. Discuss interpersonal peace within the church, beginning with peace between the pastoral leadership and the church members. Have students suggest ways they could show love and respect for their pastoral leadership in the coming week. (Q15)
2. Have your class think of ways to encourage and help a fellow believer who is facing difficult or disheartening circumstances. (Q16)

3. Challenge your students to consider how they might show patience and kindness with those who frustrate them or mistreat them. (Q17)
4. Discuss internal peace.

Paul taught us that internal peace comes as we trust God's leading, God's Word, and God's power and love God's people.

ASK: Which of Paul's instructions do you need to work on?
How will you do that? (Q18)

5. Close in prayer, praising God for giving us a sure path to peace with each other and within.