



**1 & 2 THESSALONIANS
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

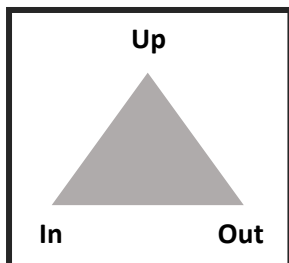
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia. Located on the Egnatian Way, a major road from Rome to the eastern provinces, the city served as centre of trade and commerce. Today, it is known as Thessaloniki, or Salonika.

Paul established the church here on his second missionary journey and it was mostly Gentile. Its members included Jason (Acts 17:9), Aristarchus and Secundus (Acts 20:4). First Thessalonians is considered one of Paul's earliest epistles, penned around AD 52. This book is unique in that every chapter ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ, hence the emphasis on holy living. The second epistle was most likely written to correct some doctrinal errors that arose after the first letter.

It is good to remember that Paul wrote his thirteen books around three different times. We know this as the 'Pauline cycle'. The first letter of Thessalonians falls into the first section of Paul's writings and the second letter into the second section, as follows:

AD 52-56: **Gospel truths** (eg. Romans, 1 Thessalonians).

AD 60-62: **Practice of the truths** (eg. 2 Thessalonians).

AD 62-67: **Passing on the truths** (eg. Timothy, Titus).

It's great stuff this. I hope you enjoy. I tried to write the devotionals on these two books in a study style because this is why they were originally written – to teach.

Grab your Bible, journal, pen, a comfy chair, and your brew. Off we go!!!

Love and prayers,

Phil

Read

1 Thessalonians 1

Live

Joined by Silvanus and Timothy who had been with him when the gospel was first preached in Thessalonica, Paul offers his hello's. I love how his idea of them being chosen is based on how they received the gospel; it had come to them not only in word, but in power, by the Holy Spirit, and in full conviction. That sounds pretty awesome. They, in turn, became examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia by following Paul and, of course, the Lord. From them the word had sounded forth in every place and the news of their faith toward God had so spread that Paul didn't need to tell others about them. Actually, others were telling Paul of the Thessalonians' conversion!

One has to be impressed by the potential a new congregation has for spreading the gospel of Christ and being an example to all believers. I love this. Positive minds produce positive lives and negative minds produce negative lives. Positive thoughts are always full of faith and hope. Negative thoughts are always full of fear and doubt. A negative person is not good company, they bring us down a rabbit hole that's not good. Their glass is always half empty and, in every situation, there is a heaviness about them. They find the spot, the blemish in every project.

When we are going through difficult trials in life, it is hard to see God's hand in them. The tendency is to be negative rather than positive. The problem is we tend to live life horizontally rather than vertically. We often resist what is new and unexpected, and as a result, become reticent, suspicious, and closed, raising our paranoia barrier, thinking, 'Everyone is against me, they don't understand.' However, life is full of changes and challenges. Only God knows the ones that are around the corner for us all.

Pray

Father, the odds are *never* stacked against Your eternal decrees and covenant purposes. There's never been panic or consternation in heaven. You never 'try' to do anything and You don't cross Your fingers and hope for the best. You never have to go back to the drawing board or resort to plan B or C. You are God, and there is no other. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Paul now looks at his own conduct while he was with them. Seeking not the glory of men but of God, he spoke with boldness despite conflict. He was also gentle with them, like a nursing mother with her children. I love that Paul's manner of life was sacrificial, working hard not to be a burden to them, behaving devoutly, justly, and blamelessly. He charges them to walk in a way worthy of God who was calling them into His kingdom and glory. Even though it has been only a short while since he has seen them, he has desired time and again to come to them, but Satan had hindered him. His longing to see them is due to his view of them as his hope, joy, and crown of rejoicing in the presence of Jesus when He comes again.

I find it really powerful how this chapter reminds us that they received the Word even though it meant a cost to them. To have the Word and believe it and trust in it was worth more than comfort and safety. It was a treasure. They accepted suffering rather than give it up. I suppose the big learning for us is that to accept the Word of God is to accept it as more precious than possessions and life.

It is interesting that Paul mentions the Thessalonians followed the godly example of the Judean churches. This speaks volumes to me. I am sure the cultures of the two areas were much different. Judea had a different lifestyle from those in Thessalonica, but the Thessalonians weren't prejudiced or judgmental, they followed the Judeans' example of godliness. The church in Thessalonica had suffered much at the hands of their own countrymen. Those who knew them best persecuted them the worst. Much of their opposition wasn't from those without, but from within. It is a sad reality, but true nonetheless, that we often face hurtful opposition from those we would never expect such treatment from. Often those who know us the best can hurt us the worst.

Pray

Father, I can and must find my place in Your story, pushing back the effects of the fall and offering the first fruits to You. Because of Your grace, I will do so with a heart of passion and great anticipation. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

1 Thessalonians 3

Live

This statement in verse 3 catches me, *“You know very well we were destined for them”*. When we back up a verse, we see it refers to trials. Could it be that we have become so used to attributing trials to sin or lack of faith that we are blinded to the fact that just maybe God uses trials to deepen our love and dependence on Him?

Paul expresses his concern for the faithfulness of the church and explains why Timothy had been sent to them while he himself remained in Athens. Fearful that their afflictions might have given Satan an opportunity to tempt them and render his labours among them in vain, Timothy was sent to establish and encourage them in their faith. I love how Timothy brought back good news to Paul concerning the church at Thessalonica, telling him of their faith and love, their fond memories of Paul, and their desire to see him again. This greatly comforted Paul who was suffering his own afflictions.

In verse 10, we see Paul is praying night and day that he might see them again and perfect what is lacking in their faith. What a guy! I love Paul’s prayers in the epistles. This one is a great example. He asks God to establish their hearts and make them blameless in holiness before God at the coming of Christ with all His saints.

I haven’t suffered anywhere near what Paul endured, but I have had to battle discouragement. It wasn’t a problem for me in the early years, but as time went by, I began to wonder whether all the years of service had made much difference. Then I noticed that the Lord balanced out criticism with the encouragement of hearing that I had helped someone. It is so important to encourage one another. When you hear of how God has used you to bring someone to Christ or to help someone stand firm in faith, it’s so uplifting.

Pray

Father, I’m no longer afraid of Your return. I very much want You to come back. Oh, loving Bridegroom, the oil in my lamp will never run dry, for You’ve sealed me as Your own and have sent the Spirit to dwell in my heart forever. You’re amazing, God. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Paul begins a series of apostolic instructions related to the Christian's walk in holiness, especially in view of the coming of Christ. He first focuses on their sanctification and the massive destruction that arises from sexual immorality. The Bible is clear on how we should control ourselves sexually. Sex is not evil; it is ordained in the marriage union between one man and one woman for the continuance of the race and for pleasure in marriage. What makes people's desires evil is their self-centred commitment to follow those desires contrary to God's will and at the expense or exploitation of others.

I love verses 9 and 10 as Paul urges them to increase more and more in brotherly love. Even though they were already doing it, Paul says, 'Keep turning it up a notch or two'. Remember, this is a guy who, at one time in his life, tortured and imprisoned Christians. I think you will agree with me that there was a massive transformation in his life.

Paul's next exhortation may be seen as mundane but it is so important. He says that they ought to walk properly toward outsiders, urging them to lead quiet lives, mind their own business, and work with their own hands. God has not called us to lazy lives. And then there is a little section in verses 13 and 14 that I find moving. If you have lost someone close, you will realise that Paul wasn't saying not to grieve. Of course, we will have sorrow. Paul was simply reminding us that we have an eternal hope that the world doesn't have.

Finally, we have a description of the Lord's second coming. When the Lord comes, the dead in Christ will rise first and we who are alive will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air and be with Him forever. Is it any wonder Paul says Christians should comfort one another with these words!

Pray

Father, open the eyes of my heart and help me to see Jesus clearly today. I would be thrilled to see more of heaven and all the amazing stuff You have planned for me, but just show me more of Jesus – my perfect Righteousness, my constant Intercessor, my loving Bridegroom, my reigning King. That will be enough, more than enough. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Paul knows he does not need to write to the Thessalonians concerning the timing of the Lord's coming. They know full well that He will come as a thief in the night or as suddenly as labour pains hit a pregnant woman. He states that this event will happen with sudden destruction and catch many people unexpectedly. This is pretty startling stuff. His point is that it shouldn't be like this for us because we are children of light, of the day. In the light of this, we should be awake and ready, not like the children of darkness.

I take it the "others" in verse 6 refers to unbelievers, pictured here as sleeping. If they hear someone mention God's impending judgment on sinners, they roll their eyes as if the person giving the warning believes in myths from the dark ages. Those who sleep spiritually are in spiritual darkness, either like those physically asleep or like a drunk who has no idea of dangers around him. There is much of this language around sleeping throughout the New Testament. The disciples could not stay awake to pray with Jesus in the Garden. The virgins in Jesus' parable of His second coming all fell asleep while waiting for the bridegroom. The wise virgins had prepared themselves with sufficient oil, but the foolish ones slept without enough oil. The wise were taken into the wedding feast, but the foolish were shut out. Jesus' application is, *"Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."*

In verse 19, Paul says, *"Do not put out the Spirit's fire."* Interestingly, he follows this up by telling us not to ignore prophecies. This suggests that we quench the Spirit by ignoring the gifts! I love this letter of 1 Thessalonians. It is filled with hope and beauty as we await our King's return. It is no wonder we call these the 'teaching' epistles. If one could allow this book to engulf their lifestyle, they would be an incredible person.

Pray

Father, I love how You are constantly running to me in the Word, inviting me, pleading with me to get on the dance floor of Your grace – to enjoy the music of reconciliation, to sing the songs of redemption, to make merry to the glory of God. I repent of not living life to the full in You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The first epistle to the Thessalonians was written in response to news brought back by Timothy. Encouraged by their steadfastness in the face of persecution, Paul exhorted them to holiness in view of the Lord's coming. From the second letter, it appears that they had remained strong in the Lord despite persecution. However, we do see that misunderstanding about the Lord's coming was creeping into the church. Some members were being troubled by false reports; others had stopped working, assuming that the Lord's soon return meant one did not need to work anymore.

I love how Paul makes mention of his obligation to always thank God for the growth of their faith and how their love abounded towards one another. This is one cool church. Paul is so impressed that he has boasted to other churches of their patience and faith in the midst of tribulations. Because of their suffering, which made them worthy of the kingdom of God, God will be righteous to bring tribulation upon those who trouble them and to give them rest, along with Paul and others. This will happen when Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, when in flaming fire He will take vengeance on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I'm not sure about you, but these things often fry the circuit-board of my faith. I feel like shouting, "I believe, Lord, but help me believe it more!" All God has *ever* done is serve His people – through Jesus' life of perfect obedience and death of perfect sin-bearing, by His resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, through His heavenly intercession and sovereign rule over all things. As we consider all the ways He serves us, may His grace give us passion and delight to serve Him in return. Whose feet do I wash today? Whose burdens do I bear? Where and how might God use me as a means by which His love becomes tangible and irresistible?

Pray

Father, because the gospel is true, I'm ready to serve You with all that I have. After all, You served me with a glorious redemption and a hope of heaven. According to the Scriptures, when You return, You will have me, the bride of Christ, recline at Your table! In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

2 Thessalonians 2

Live

As we saw in chapter 1, Paul got word that some of the Thessalonians had the impression that Jesus was about to return. To reassure them, Paul reminds them of those things he told them while he was still with them; that is, Jesus will not come until the falling away occurs and the man of sin is revealed. He then describes this man of sin and explains that he is currently hindered from being revealed. When that which restrains him is removed, the man of sin will become apparent, but the Lord will destroy him with His return.

I love this stuff so much! The coming of the lawless one is further described as one in cohorts with Satan. With all power, signs, and lying wonders, he will deceive those who do not have a love for the truth. It's unreal that God will also send a strong delusion to those who do not love the truth, that they might believe the lie and be condemned for their unrighteous acts.

As for the Thessalonians themselves, Paul is ever thankful that God has chosen them for salvation. He encourages them to stand fast and hold to the traditions. He prays that God will comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work. 1 Peter 1:18,19 says we are *“not redeemed with corruptible things...but with His blood.”* Notice what this is saying; in the natural world, silver and gold are imperishable and blood perishable but the opposite is true in the Kingdom of God. I love Revelation 19 where John's vision reveals Jesus. Having secured the defeat of the prince of darkness, He is the rider on the white horse and He alone is worthy of the name Faithful and True. He is faithful to fulfil every promise He made for the salvation of His people and the restoration of creation. God truly is bringing to completion His good work of redemption. This, for sure, is what we can stand on, the teaching that has been passed to us by these incredible epistles.

Pray

Father, thank You that evil will not prevail; it has been defeated and it will be eradicated. You are already the King of kings and Lord of lords, working all things together after the counsel of the Godhead, working in all things for the good of Your beloved people. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love how this last chapter begins with Paul asking for prayer covering, that the word of the Lord might have free course and spread like the wind. It is evident that Paul was feeling strong demonic resistance to the proclamation of the Kingdom. Some things in life haven't changed!

Straight after his personal plea for their prayers, Paul follows with a prayer to tackle their impatience. Then he goes for the jugular and hits out against downright laziness. One thing about our Paul is that he didn't miss you and hit the wall! He reminds them of his own example in labouring night and day while he was with them. I have a feeling that Paul might get himself in trouble in today's society by saying that if anyone doesn't work, they shouldn't eat. This is strong stuff! Paul also has a go at the members who had stopped working and had become busybodies. His advice to the others is to disassociate with such people so that they may be ashamed. I love how he adds a little footnote on how this should be done; such disassociation was to be administered in a brotherly way. It was not meant to be cold and callous but rather to show a tough kind of love.

I love all of Paul's wee prayers. He closes his second epistle to the Thessalonians by first asking that the Lord of peace give them peace always in every way. He then offers a 'goodbye' in his own handwriting as a sign of authenticity. If this book does anything, it encourages us to remember that God is timeless in His engagement with His creation and His people. He always has been, presently is, and always will be the God who is working all things together after the counsel of His will. Nothing gets by Him or threatens the execution of His eternal decrees. God is constantly executing His will in *all* things, from feeding sparrows and clothing flowers to revealing and applying the grace of Jesus. Nothing and no one can resist Him.

Pray

Father, You've never lied, exaggerated, or withheld any revelation we need for serving You in the world. You are the Creator of the heavens and the earth and You allow me to call You ABBA FATHER. I love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

