



## ALMOST HEAVEN • Healthy Community

### What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

#### I Thessalonians 5

Paul closes I Thessalonians by writing a set of rapid-fire instructions that can appear to be random. But they are a cohesive thought, centered around the theme of a healthy community. You can categorize his statements loosely under three headings: respect for leaders (5:12-13), building one another up in love (5:13-15) and active ministry of the Holy Spirit (5:16-22). Then Paul finishes the letter with a prayer for their sanctification and a few final greetings (5:23-28).

#### Respect for Leaders

Paul's first instruction is for the Thessalonians to respect and love their leaders. This is essential because without respect for people in positions of spiritual authority a community will dissolve – grumbling and dissent can take root and turn to bitterness, rebellion and fracture. Spiritual leaders are called to sacrificially and willingly love and care for those they lead, and when this is reciprocated with love and respect, the community flourishes. When one side abuses their position – whether it is leaders abusing their position or those being led rebelling and disrespecting leadership – the community can fall apart.

#### Encouraging, Loving and Building One Another Up

In verse 5:11, Paul says, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” The instructions Paul gives from the end of verse 13 through verse 15 can be seen as practical applications of this command. He tells them to be at peace amongst themselves (v. 13) – the opposite of which is chaos or disunity. Lack of love and healthy, encouraging relationships brings disunity. In a sense, this verse can sum up all of the instructions Paul gives in this passage – disrespect for leaders, doing harm rather than good, quenching the Spirit, etc. all can lead to chaos.

In verse 14 we see four specific instructions, each addressing how to love people in differing circumstances and struggles. He gives these instructions to the community at large, not just the leaders – anyone in the Christian community can minister to anyone else. This privilege is not just for leaders. The students you've been ministering to can minister to one another just the same after you've gone. Paul says to “admonish the idle”, indicating some tough love; to “encourage the fainthearted”, indicating coming alongside someone with words of love and encouragement; “help the weak”, indicating mercifully and compassionately stretching out a helping hand; and “be patient with them all”, indicating grace and allowing God to change people over time. A point that comes out of these thoughts is that different people require different forms of

### What's the Big Idea?

A healthy community is marked by respect for leaders; encouraging, loving and building one another up; and an active ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is made possible as Christians are sanctified and model the life and teachings of Christ in the context of community.

### What's the Problem?

More and more in this world, we can see individualism (disunity), disrespect for leadership, seeking personal good instead of the good of others, quenching the Holy Spirit by sin and utter disregard for teaching (prophecy). Without a healthy community to protect us, we are likely to accommodate the ways of the world in our own lives.



love – some need more grace than truth, and vice versa. When we go about ministering to people in the same way each time, we can end up hurting people and not giving them what they really need. Wisdom and prayer are needed in discerning what each person needs, and experience and a close walk with God help us grow in these areas.

Paul commands the people against seeking revenge and harm to one another, instead seeking to do good to all, both to those inside and outside the church. Perhaps he has a view toward evangelism – love and patience speak volumes to a non-believer.

#### Active Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Verse 19 says, “Do not quench the Spirit”, or “Don’t put out the Spirit’s fire.” The verses immediately preceding and following this verse show some ways that we quench the Spirit and ways to avoid putting out His fire. Fire needs fuel to burn (v. 16-18, Scripture reading, fellowship, etc.), and it goes out if smothered (the opposites of v. 20-22, sin, worldliness, etc.).

Verses 16-18 speak about joy, prayer and thankfulness. Each of these are good for our hearts, and practicing these things opens our hearts to the influence of the Spirit. Ephesians 6:18-21 says, “be filled with the Spirit”, and then tells us to worship the Lord in song, encourage one another, be thankful for everything and submit to one another. These disciplines cultivate our hearts and help us to remain in Him.

Verses 20-22 tell of a few things that quench the Spirit – despising prophecies (ignoring teaching or throwing out all of someone’s teaching because of a few disagreeable points) and giving in to evil or sin, even in the smallest forms. Instead of rejecting teaching because of a few points of contention, Paul instructs to use discernment and hold on to the good.

#### Sanctification and the Model of Christ

Paul prays in verses 23-24 for the sanctification of the community. Sanctification and the Spirit-filled life, which were discussed in the third study of this series, are the solutions for unhealthiness in community. People who are being sanctified and living the Spirit-filled life will respect leaders in increasing measure, love and encourage brothers and sisters and certainly not quench the Spirit.

Also, Jesus provides a wonderful model for us to look to in each of these areas. He respected the leadership of His Father by constantly submitting to His will. He dealt with people of widely varying struggles and circumstances with wisdom, compassion and love, ministering to each according to his need perfectly. He lived in joy, constant prayer and thankfulness and allowed the Holy Spirit to work and speak. He’s our ultimate example to look to!

## What’s Our Response?

A natural response is to examine our own lives to see areas where we’re disrespecting leaders, seeking revenge or harm for others rather than good, bringing disunity to community or quenching the Spirit. This question is pointedly asked, and the solution is repentance and submission to the Holy Spirit for sanctification, and looking to Jesus as our model.

Being a study on community, this study has several application questions directed at the various communities students are a part of: project team, in-country believers and school communities. Specific applications can be drawn out for each. One such application worth mentioning is to not let conflict or unhealthiness on your team linger – to deal with it even though the project will end soon. Unresolved issues will still have impact even after your team has gone separate ways, personally and in how the testimony of your community will be remembered by those you’ve spent the summer ministering to.

## What Are the Questions?

### I Thessalonians 5

#### LAUNCH

What have you observed about the community on our team and among the believers here in \_\_\_\_\_? What do you see that is healthy? Unhealthy?

#### EXPLORE

Read I Thessalonians 5:12-28.

1. What are some observations about this chapter? What themes are present? What is the main point Paul is trying to make?
2. Verse 13 says "Be at peace among yourselves." The opposite of peace is chaos, or disunity. How do all the instructions in this passage speak against disunity?
3. Why is it essential to have respect and love for those in positions of spiritual authority?
4. What are some ways people disrespect authority? What are some ways they respect it?
5. Verse 14 speaks about dealing with different types of people in different ways. What happens when you try to deal with people and the struggles they face in the same way each time? How has this happened this summer?
6. What does it mean to quench the Spirit? What are some ways people do this?
7. What is the opposite of quenching? How can we add fuel to the Spirit's fire?
8. What is the solution to the various marks of unhealthy community described in this passage?
9. How did Jesus model respect for leadership, love and the building up of others and allowing the Holy Spirit room to work?

#### APPLY

10. Where in your life do you see: disrespect for leaders? Seeking revenge or harm for others? Bringing disunity? Quenching the Holy Spirit?
11. In the short time we have left together as a team, how can our community become more healthy?
12. How can we help the community here in \_\_\_\_\_ become more healthy?
13. What are some application points from this lesson that you can take back to the movement on your campus?

## What Are the Answers?

1. A healthy community is marked by respect for leaders; encouraging, loving and building one another up; and an active ministry of the Holy Spirit.
2. Each topic addressed (disrespecting leaders, interpersonal relationships, quenching the Spirit) can lead to chaos or disunity.
3. Grumbling, dissent, rebellion can fracture a community.
4. Disrespect: critical spirit, rebellion, grumbling. Respect: obedience, submission, affirmation.
5. We can end up hurting people and not giving them what they really need.
6. Stifling His work in our lives or in a community. Sin, disobedience, rejecting teaching, poor discernment (v. 20-22).
7. Adding fuel, increasing. Prayer, rejoicing, worship, thankfulness, encouragement, etc. (v. 16-18).
8. Sanctification, Spirit-filled living.
9. See “What Do I Need To Know About the Passage?” Come up with specific examples.
10. Allow the group to discuss. Point to repentance, walking in the Spirit and allowing Him to sanctify and modeling Christ-likeness.
11. Allow the group to discuss. Look for specific action points for your team. See “What’s Our Response?” for an important note to mention.
12. Brainstorm and be creative. Possible applications can be: writing letters of exhortation as Paul did after you return home, reading 1 Thess. with them, looking for specific issues to gently address, encouraging them that they can minister to one another (v. 14)
13. Allow the group to discuss. Encourage them to do something that will help them remember application points.

## Memorize

Be at peace among yourselves.

1 Thessalonians 5:13b