

# Sermon Group Discussion Questions

## Center Point Church

### Sermon Summary

Pastor Tyler Wittmer's powerful sermon from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 emphasizes the crucial role of sanctification in a believer's life. Drawing on Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, the pastor explains that sanctification involves more than mere forgiveness; it is a life-long process guided by the Holy Spirit to attain greater holiness and closeness to Christ's image. The pastor highlights the misguided belief that salvation permits a life devoid of piety, equating this stance to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of "cheap grace" which preaches forgiveness without the requirement of repentance or discipleship. Instead, Wittmer portrays the cross as a tool to obliterate sin rather than encourage it. He also underscores that the cost of salvation should urge believers to follow the path of sanctity. Specifically, Wittmer discusses the rampant sexual immorality prevalent amongst the Thessalonians due to cultural norms of the time, urging believers to resist such temptations. This act of resilience is not only against physical acts but extends to intent, as even fantasizing about someone is tantamount to adultery. Wittmer empathizes with the guilt and shame one may feel due to sexual wrong doings, yet reassures that true sanctification can cleanse and justify all. He emphasizes the importance of accountability and forming partnerships with the Holy Spirit to work towards a life pleasing to God. The pastor concludes by reminding each believer the obligation to follow the path of sanctification as turning away from it is equivalent to disregarding God. The journey to sanctity, he insists, should be reflected in one's character, teachings, and actions. The memory of the sacrifice made by Christ for their salvation should drive believers towards holiness. Wittmer delivers his message with an air of stern warning and urgency, stressing the need for true understanding of salvation's cost and the pursuit of sanctification with the help of the Holy Spirit..

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the main purpose of preaching God's word according to Pastor Wittmer in this sermon?

*Context: Pastor Wittmer explains that the purpose is to deliver a message from the Lord that has the power to transform hearts and lives.*

*Application Question: How have you experienced transformation in your life through hearing God's word?*

2. Why does Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians emphasize the importance of sanctification?

*Context: Paul urges them to pursue their sanctification because of their faith in Jesus, as they have been chosen by God and turned away from idolatry.*

*Application Question: How does understanding that you have been chosen by God impact your motivation to pursue holiness in your life?*

3. What does 'cheap grace' mean, and why is it a misunderstanding of the true nature of grace?

*Context: 'Cheap grace' is defined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer as preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance or discipleship, and Pastor Wittmer argues that grace should compel believers to pursue holiness, not give them permission to sin.*

*Application Question: How can you make sure to not treat God's grace as 'cheap' in your personal life?*

4. Why does Paul specifically address sexual immorality in his letter to the Thessalonians and how does it relate to the concept of sanctification?

*Context: Greek culture at that time had a rampant sexual culture, including prostitution and temple prostitution. Paul urges believers to control their bodies in holiness, avoiding lustful passions, as this relates to the process of sanctification.*

*Application Question: What steps can you take to resist worldly influences and remain set apart for God in the area of sexual purity?*

5. What are some practical ways believers can partner with the Holy Spirit as they pursue their sanctification?

*Context: Pastor Wittmer calls believers to seek accountability, block what they can see to avoid temptation, and live lives that please God.*

*Application Question: What specific actions can you take in your daily life to partner with the Holy Spirit in your pursuit of holiness?*

## **Sermon Transcript**

If you have a Bible, go ahead and flip open with me to first Thessalonians, chapter four.

Paul first Thessalonians, chapter four. He begins the text this way. Verse one. Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus. Finally here signifies we have moved from the introduction of the letter to the conclusion of the letter.

And we're going to be in Paul's conclusion of the letter for a good bit. Because he has heard the positive report of their faith, because he cares for them, he prays for them, he loves them, as he has communicated to them so often throughout the letter. Because of this, he implores them, urges them, he says, those who are in the Lord Jesus, if you're highlighting, if you're circling like I do when I'm reading or listening, circle in the Lord Jesus. In the Lord Jesus highlighted, Paul is talking to those same believers in Thessalonica that he had told in chapter one. For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in

word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction, the same believers in Thessalonica who he goes on to say in chapter one.

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaea, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere. So that we need not say anything, for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Here he is talking to believers who have placed their faith in Christ. They belong to him. They are in the Lord Jesus.

It's like the verse before in Colossians three that Nick preached last week. He preached starting in verse five and verse four. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. The context of this passage in first Thessalonians chapter four is to believers, and he says to them that as you received from us, as you receive from us, he's told them this before. This is not new information, but what we all need as we walk with God, reminders of what God has told us.

Does anybody else feel like that? With regularity? Sometimes you read the gospels and you think, how do the disciples keep forgetting things? And then you do any amount of self reflection, and you think, oh, I also need reminding verse two, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing that, you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus, through the Lord Jesus circle that highlight that in your mind.

Those who have been saved by the Lord Jesus in Thessalonica who are in the Lord Jesus, Paul wants to remind them of the instruction that he has given to them through the Lord Jesus. Not only are they in Jesus, they are instructed by Jesus. They have been commanded by the Lord Jesus how they ought to walk to please God. Paul tells them, for this is the will of God, your sanctification.

I am regularly asked by people, predominantly young people. Am I supposed to take this job? Is this God's will for my life? Should I be dating this person? How do I know what I'm supposed to pursue?

Scripture tells us in several instances, very specifically, what God's will is for us. So God, it is God's will that you are saved. One Timothy two four, it is God's will that you live transformed lives. Romans twelve two it is God's will that you have a good testimony to those outside the church. One Peter 2:13 through 15, it is God's will that you suffer for living righteous lives.

One Peter 3:17 through 18, it is God's will that you are spirit filled. Ephesians 5:18, it is God's will that you be thankful first. Thessalonians 5:18. The purpose of this message to the church in Thessalonica and to us, the purpose of this message today. Centerpoint church if you are in this room and you are in Christ, you are instructed by Christ.

The will of God is your sanctification. The will of God is your sanctification. I want to note the difference between justification and sanctification. Succinctly, these are two theological words, so put on your theological caps with me for a moment. Justification is the one time act when God, by faith in Christ, declares us righteous in Christ.

Romans 3:23. It says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, verse 24, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put

forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. Or more famously, I believe in two Corinthians 5:21 for our sake he made him Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Who's he writing to?

Those who are in Jesus we are justified by grace through faith in Christ, in the person, work, and resurrection of Christ. That is our justification declared righteous. Our sanctification is an ongoing process. One writer summarized it this way. Sanctification, on the other hand, is the continual process of being made more holy.

It is the progressive conformity of the one who has been justified into the image of their savior through the work of the Holy Spirit. Like justification, sanctification is a work of grace through faith, and sanctification is possible because of the work of Christ on our behalf. Sanctification is what Paul is talking about there in two Corinthians 3:18, where he says, and we all together with unveiled faces, kind of hearkening back some language from exodus there in Moses, with unveiled faces beholding the glory of God, are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. And this comes from the Lord who is the spirit. Sanctification is partnering with the Holy Spirit that has, according to ephesians, sealed us, that is, in us to be transformed more into the likeness of Jesus, that we would grow to be more holy, because the God that we serve is holy.

This is the will of God for your life, that we would be more like him by his grace for our good and for his glory. Brother and sister, hear me. That's the will of God for you as a believer, that you would come by his grace through faith to look more and more like Jesus, saying that it is by his grace that we grow should not lead some to say, if then God has saved me, can I just continue then to live? However, I would like to live apart from his will. For me, Paul writing in diatribe in Romans, diatribe is a function of writing, a style of writing that tries to anticipate your opponent's argument.

And Paul sensing that some of the people in Rome, they might think that way, he says in chapter six, what shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin? That grace may abound by no means how can we who died in sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore, with baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

It's why every time we have a baptism, when they were pushing them under, we say, you are buried with Christ in baptism. It's symbolic, showing that the old has passed away. Behold a new creation, not that the baptism is saving, but what it represents. Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in a new life, following after him, brother and sister. The cross of Christ is not permission to sin.

It is the power needed to regularly crucify the sin in your life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer the great German theologian author the cost of discipleship defined those that believed that once they were saved that it did not matter how they lived. As adhering to what he called to cheap grace, he defines cheap grace this way. He says, cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheap jacks wares, the sacraments, the forgiveness of sin and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the church's inexhaustible treasury from which the showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price, grace without cost.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. Baptism without church discipline. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. And then, in defining what grace actually is, he says this it is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, he says, it is costly because it costs God the life of his son. You were bought at a price, and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.

Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace, he says, is the incarnation of God. If we really understand the cost of our salvation, if we really consider that the God who created us, who made us in his image. He stepped into his creation fully man, fully God. And he did that for us.

He died beaten, mocked, scorned by the very ones he came to save. And he triumphantly rose, trampling sin and death. And if that's true and we believe it, if we believe he was pierced for our transgressions, if we understand the grace that we have been given, we were dead in our sin and trespass, I mean dead in it. Paul makes that clear in talking to the church in Ephesus, he said, and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the heir, in the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Dead in that.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love in which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you have been saved and raised up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. This is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that none may boast and trust me. We want to, don't we, oh Lord?

We want to boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them if we can look at the gift of grace that we have received, that God has given us, and the first thing that we think is great, now I can live, however I want to live.

God help us. That we have not understood the cost.

We have not understood his grace, his love, his mercy to us. If we do consider it, we do understand it. It is by the power of this grace, the power of this mercy and the spirit of God that is inside of us that we are able to fight against the flesh, to fight for our sanctification. Paul says in verse three, for this is the will of God, your sanctification.

And then he gets more specific, that you abstain from sexual immorality. For each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know better that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness, Paul gets even more specific. He outlines a portion, a part of our sanctification, God's will for our life. Sanctification, a part of that.

That you abstain from sexual immorality in self control, not in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles, who do not know God. The context that Paul was speaking into the word here for sexual immorality that Paul uses is the Greek word *pornea*. I don't have to define how we use it today because you can tell how we use the word today.

It's where we derive pornography, but it's speaking to a broader sexual culture. There was, in Thessalonica, prostitution in the streets. A notable part of Greek culture was temple prostitution. And so Paul draws comparison. Don't lust like the Gentiles, who do not know God, who do not seek to control their sexual desires, and for the believers to conform the way that they live to God and not be conformed by their sexual culture.

But consider his audience. Some of them were Greeks that came to know Christ in Thessalonica. And even if they had been Jewish, it's not as if that they were so separated from the culture as to not know what he's talking about.

They knew about the rampant sexual culture of their day. One commentator put it this bluntly. No kidding. Sometimes you read commentaries, and it's this blunt. If you wanted sex in Thessalonica, you could have it.

What's striking is how many parallels there are today in our culture. And the one that Paul's addressing. Pornography, prostitution, and sex work. There are those who seek to make their sexual preferences their person, turning their desires into the defining mark of who they are, the chief and primary thing about them, their identity. This is where the LGBTQ stuff comes from, right?

Sexual immorality is alive and well in our culture today, just like it was in Greek culture. There was homosexuality, adultery, lust, all these things that God's word calls sin. All of it was right there in Thessalonica as well. And Paul says to those who were saved in that culture, who are now pursuing God, he says to them, for this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual morality, that each of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God. That no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter.

Because the Lord is an avenger in all these things. As we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. I think when we come to a passage like this letter to Thessalonica. A solemn warning our experiences can influence the tone in which we read it. We might read this warning.

The way that an authority figure has spoken to us in the past. Or how a parent has spoken to us. Maybe in anger. I was talking to Bill Sherrard this past week. And I was telling him about this text.

And he reminded me of a conversation that he had had with one of his children. And they said, dad, growing up, it was not so much what you said. But how you said it that made such a difference to me.

I knew that you loved me, they said. And if you've ever talked to Bill Sherrard that likely connects with you. There are texts in which the urgent tone is what the text is communicating. Like what Paul says to the church in Galatia, for example. O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly crucified. Let me ask you only this. Did you receive the spirit by works of the law? Or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish?

Having begun by the spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain? If indeed it was in vain. Paul's seeking to draw division here. There are those in the church in Galatia that were believing a gospel contrary to the one that they had heard from Paul.

They were not clinging to the truth of God. They were those in the church in Galatia that had come in with a false gospel, a false message and were seeking to lead people astray. And Paul cared deeply for the church there. And to abandon the gospel that he had given them. He said, even if an angel shows up and gives you a different gospel.

It's not the right gospel. That Christ gave him this gospel. And so his tone to the church in Galatia is different.

Paul had been so affectionately desirous of the church in Thessalonica. That he had desired to give them not only the gospel of God but his own life. He had cared for them like a mother nursing their child. Exhorted them and encouraged them like a father. He had been so concerned with their faith.

That in the midst of not knowing how they were doing, he sent Timothy. And he said that when Timothy came back and reported how they were doing. He said, it's like I can breathe again. That's what it's communicating.

I imagine, in some ways, if Paul had been present with them face to face like he desired, he might address them the way that a father addresses their children. I just keep thinking of it this way. It's like those times in which I have to sternly and lovingly remind roman things that we've already talked about, right? And I get down on one knee with him, and I'm holding his hands, and I'm looking him in the eyes, and I'm telling him, lovingly, sternly, brother, we've talked about this, buddy. We've talked about this.

Remember what you would be. Remember what you're supposed to do.

Our culture is attracted to anger in some ways, us versus them battle. Look at the tone of American politics. Anger is attractive. It can draw a crowd under the guise of passion. Tone matters here, because if you read the tone wrong, if you read this tone wrong, you might think, yeah, those LGBTQ.

Those people down the street, my neighbors, they're so unlike us, those young men who are addicted to porn. Get them, Paul. Tell them.

If you read this tone wrong, you may not recognize he's talking to you.

He's talking about our sinful human hearts and how we so often twist those who were made in God's image into idols for us to exploit or something that we can make our identity apart from being an image bearer of God. Jesus says in Matthew five, he says, you have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Have you ever looked at someone lustfully?

Have you ever considered any lustful things? Jesus says, then you have already committed adultery in your heart.

It goes further than just the action. The problem is our sinful hearts. And some of us, in sexual self righteousness, we might yell out, how can you not see your sin? It is like a great lion. How do you not know that your sin is going to lead to death?

It's going to kill you. And all the while, we're holding a small lion in our arms, coddling it, saying to ourselves, this isn't what Paul means.

This one would never hurt me. This one would never hurt my friends or my family. Paul isn't talking about my sexual sin. He's talking about those other people.

For this is the will of God. Your sanctification that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of us know how to control his own body in holiness and honor. Not in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

Paul knows that sexual sin is powerful. It's shaming, and we know it too. If I had to guess, I don't. But if I had to, I would guess that for so many in this room right now, some of the deepest hurts, shame, regrets, guilt, come from sexual sin in their past, maybe even something that they're struggling in now.

Paul tells us elsewhere, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. He also tells us this to the church in Corinth, chapter six. He says, or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

But that's not where he stops, he says, and such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God. If you can stare at the cross of Christ, gazing upon Jesus, the founder and finisher of our faith, if you can look at the truth of the gospel, that we were dead in our sin, not just sort of muddy and in need of some changing dead, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive



together with Christ, by grace, you have been saved. God knew our sin, our shame, our guilt, and he knew what it deserved. It deserved his wrath.

And so he poured out that wrath for your sin, and he poured it on himself.

If you can look at that reality, that grace, and think, now I will live how I want to live, then let me lovingly and solemnly remind you, like Paul, for this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual morality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things. As we told you beforehand, and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Hear me church, take your sanctification seriously. Partner with the Holy Spirit, the power of the spirit to live lives that pursue holiness, not impurity.

Why he tells us verse eight. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man, but God, who gives his holy spirit to you. To disregard this, Paul says, is not to disregard man, but to disregard God. Paul is telling the believers in Thessalonica the very God that saved you.

You're denying him.

I want us to apply that gospel. Then, as believers who have been saved by his grace church family, pursue holiness, looking to the cross of Christ with all humility, recognizing your great need for Jesus, turn from sin and turn to him by grace. Through faith, pursue putting sin to death in your life. This is the will of God, your sanctification that you would come to look more and more like him. Brother, sister, get accountability in this.

This is why we are not saved just to be individuals. We are saved individually, that we might be a part of a body of believers.

Just like God, who has always existed as trinity, created us in his image. We are created for community. We need one another in this. Get accountability. And I would say also partnering with the Holy Spirit of God.

Fight practically. Look at the cross of Christ, say, I don't want to trample over the cross of Jesus. I want to take my sanctification seriously and start to be serious by blocking what you can view, blocking what you see. Some of you, it might be things like social media, give no provision to these things. Don't just sit there looking at other people's lions petting yours, but mine would never hurt me.

Brothers and sisters, we pursue holiness because we acknowledge that the God who saves us knows best. He created us to live lives that walk in ways that please him. And God has designed and ordained Eros, that is, passionate love, to be within the commitment of marriage. Plenty of places in scripture to point to this reality, but in the Greek for those who don't know, there are four words that mean what we would say is love. Our English word for love doesn't typically have enough specificity.

In Greek, there were four words for love. There was agape love. This is God's unconditional love to his people, to his children. There is storge, which is affection, the care of a mother to a child. This is like familial love and affection.

There's Philea, which is brotherly love, friendship and the love that friends share. And then there is eros, passionate love and I think sometimes in our culture, in Christianity, we can think all of the other loves God created. But then Satan somehow snuck in and made that one not true.

God gave us this type of passionate love, a love that is so powerful that it can share in God's act of creation, that it is the type of love that God gave us that we can take part in creating another made in his image. It is powerful, and within God's design, it is beautiful. But Paul knew that apart from God's design, it can be destructive not only in an individual's life, but within a community. He says that no one transgresses and wrong his brother in this matter because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

If your wife or husband had storge love, had affection for your family, that wouldn't bother you. If your wife or husband had filel love for their friends, you'd even find it commendable. If your wife or your husband had eros, had passionate love for another, it would cause such deep hurt, immense pain, not only within your family, but within the life of the church. And Paul knew that to the onlooking community surrounding the church that it was damaging to the testimony of Christ as well. Brother and sister, pursue holiness by the power of the spirit as believers who have been saved by his grace pursue holiness.

One Timothy 4:16 says this keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching. Persist in this, for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers.

We all have likely seen the damage that can be done when we fail to keep a close watch on our teaching and on ourselves, on our character. It hurts relationships. It hurts the church. It hurts the way the community sees Christ within the church. Paul says, this is God's will for your life, your sanctification.

Paul solemnly, lovingly warns us, pursue holiness.

Church family. As we come to the table this morning, we come with the reminder that we're not talking about cheap grace here.

When we come to the table this morning, we're reminded of the cost of our justification and the power of our sanctification. We're reminded that it is by the body and the blood of Jesus that we have been saved, that his body was broken for us, his blood poured out for us. That even in the midst of being dead, in shame and guilt and separation, God did not leave us there, but sent his son, that he might make a way for us. And we're reminded when you come to the table this morning. This is not what saves you.

It is a reminder of the cost of what saves you, the body and the blood of Jesus. And as we come to the table this morning, I would also remind you that we come remembering our sanctification, that he is the founder and finisher of our faith. It is the reminder that we need him as we continue to desire to grow more like him. It is by his power that fuels our passion to grow more like the one who has saved us. So Paul says, for I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also, he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this also as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. When we come to the table this morning, we remember God's will for your life is your sanctification that he has saved you, placed you in him, that you might continue to grow more like him?

God help us in that.