



## **Turning Down the Volume of Life: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 Pastor JD Farag**

1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and our text will be verses 9 through 12. I'll ask you to stand if you're able. You can follow along as I read and if not, where you're seated is fine.

The Apostle Paul continues writing, by the Holy Spirit, to this church. There in Thessalonica that he loves so much. He says, verse 9, "Now, about your love for one another, we do not need to write to you. For you, yourselves, have been taught by God to love each other and, in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia.

Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. You should mind your own business and work with your hands just as we told you. So that [verse 12] your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."

Let's pray, if you would join with me and we'll ask God to bless this to our understanding. Thank you, Lord. Loving Heavenly Father, we need for you at this time, as only you can, to quiet our minds, settle our hearts and focus our attention by the Holy Spirit. So that we can hear you speak as only you can. In that still small voice of the Holy Spirit. So, Lord, will you? Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. In Jesus name. Amen and amen. You can be seated. Thank you.

Alright. As you can see by the screen, I chose to title today's teaching: "Turning Down the Volume of Life". I need to preface today's teaching with a confession. I just have to be very open with you and say to you that this is an area in my life that is a great struggle for me. It's an area in my life that the Lord, over the years, has been doing a work in me.

This is a big issue for me and has been for many years. Specifically, as it relates to turning down the volume of life. When life gets noisy and busy; and life gets noisy and busy. Especially, in a day where everything is clamoring for our attention. What I'm hoping to do today is talk about the benefits and the blessings. That come to those who, as the Apostle Paul writes, "Makes it their ambition, aspires to this, seeks to do this, to lead a quiet Christian life."

I found two blessings, benefits. You might find more. But the two that I found? That's what I want to talk about. I believe have the potential to really change our lives in a dramatic way.

The first one is in verses 9 and 10. Interesting, it's that we'll have more love for God's people. I find it so interesting that Paul is, once again, as he did earlier, commending them. This time for



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their love of one for another while he encourages them, even urges them, to excel even more.

It seems that this love characterized these Thessalonian believers. Now, here's the question: What was it about them that made them so loving? What was it about them that made them love each other so much?

This was a loving Church. This was a church that if you were to go to it, attend it and visit this church? The first thing that you would have seen, and noticed and observed would be, "Wow! This is so really welcoming and loving Church." They just loved each other.

So, how is it and why is it that they were so loving? The answer is in verse 9 and it can be easily, missed at first read. Notice where Paul says that they loved each other so much. In fact, "as they were doing" and he says why.

It was because God taught them to love. Oh? Wait! God taught them to love that much one another? Yes. Well, why are you making such a big deal about this, pastor?

Because the implication is this. In order for God to teach them to love each other this much? It implies that they had to be teachable. That they had to be listening to and be willing to be taught by the Lord to love this way.

In other words, it would seem to indicate that they listened and they had ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to receive. That which God desired to teach them concerning love. One of the greatest struggles in my life is to turn down the volume of life. So that I can hear the Lord speak into my life. That's a great struggle for me.

When I was in high school, I had a teacher by the name of Mr. Bowman. Great teacher. In fact, I, at one of my class reunions, had the opportunity to tell him. That I was using him in many of my sermon illustrations to which he was greatly flattered.

He was one of those teachers that when he spoke... First of all, he was monotone. Do you know what do I mean by monotone? They just have one tone. They just speak in one tone. Also, he spoke very softly.

I'll never forget the first day in his class. We walked in. I thought it was a joke. Of course. I thought everything was a joke in high school. But I thought, "Are you kidding me? I mean, we were all loud. We were just like making all this noise.



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He walks into the classroom, stands behind the desk, chalkboard behind him and he starts speaking very softly, and says, "Okay, would you all please take your seat." Nobody heard him. I noticed that his lips were moving and he was actually talking. I'm like, "Hey! Speak up! We can't hear you, Mr. Bowman." To which he replied, "No, this is how I talk. Do you want to hear what I'm saying? Then you need to quiet down." So, I mean, boy!

Of course, I wasn't a believer. I didn't get saved till age 19. But over the years, I've looked back on that and it was as if the Lord was saying to me, "I'm like Mr. Bowman. Do you want to hear me speak? This is how I speak and I'm not going to compete with all the noise in your life. And I'm not going to yell. No, when I speak, I speak in a still small voice."

I know this is going to date me. I've shared this many times before. Do you remember back in the 70s that shampoo commercial? "If you want to get somebody's attention? Whisper." Oh, that'll do it. Look at you! You are so attentive right now. If you could just see yourself! You're going: What?

Isn't it true that when you're yelling? You tend to tune out the one who is raising their voice? This was my mom, bless her heart. When I was growing up as a kid? Man, she would hit this certain pitch. This certain key. It was a very high octave. This key that she would hit in her thick accent and she would yell at me, "...". As soon as she hit that key, I mean if I had ear lids, they're shut. We don't have your lids, by the way.

So, I mean, I didn't hear anything else beyond that. All I heard was... That was it. But there were some times where she would come to me and she would say "...". ... What? She would talk to me softly, in a quiet voice, and it got my attention.

That's what I believe the Lord is saying to us today. Let those who have an ear, or two. We all have... Everybody as two ears here, right? Yeah. Good. "Whoever has an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the church." In the Old Testament, replete throughout the Old Testament God declares, "Hear, O Israel."

Do you know how it is that you can hear but not really hear? Someone's talking to you and you're not really hearing what they're saying. I mean, you're listening. But you're not really hearing, receiving, what it is that they're saying. Oftentimes the reason for that is because our lives are just too loud.

I have a book in my library. It's a great devotional written by Chuck Swindoll. It's titled, "Intimacy with the Almighty". It is a



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treasured devotional that I've read many, many times over the years. Most recently actually, just recently, I read it again. He even shares his own struggles especially as a pastor to simplify... Because we live our lives so complicated. Oh, my goodness.

Our lives are so busy. Our lives are so noisy. Swindoll writes this, "Noise and words and frenzied hectic schedules dull our senses. Closing our ears to his still small voice and making us numb to his touch." He writes, later on in the book, that it was such a great challenge for him to just have times of solitude and silence. Where he could just hear the Lord speak in that still small voice.

I wonder what the Lord would desire to say to you, to say to me? If we would but quiet our lives and listen to his voice. One of my favorite men mightily, used of God in Scripture is Elijah. I love this guy. Amazing guy, he bursts onto the scene. God is alive! I mean, this guy was a mighty man of God and mightily used of God. Then there comes this point and it's in 1 Kings chapter 18.

I want to give you a kind of the back story of what led up to what I want to talk about concerning Elijah. He has this contest with Baal and the prophets of Baal. They are on Mount Carmel. For those of you who have gone to Israel with us, we visit that location. Here the prophets of Baal are in this contest with Elijah concerning their god. As opposed to in contest with the true and living God.

So, they get the first try. They have this altar and they have the sacrifice. They're trying to call down fire to consume the sacrifice. So those who are worshiping Baal are screaming and cutting themselves. Very interesting. And there's no sign of their god, Baal. This goes on apparently, as we're told in the narrative, for a few hours. Better part of the morning into the afternoon.

Elijah's having fun with it. This is what I love about this guy. He's just, I mean, he's having a lot of fun with this. Very amused and he kind of gives them a hard time. Says things to them like, "You know, maybe you just need to scream louder? Maybe he's hard-of-hearing? Scream louder. So, they scream louder. Still nothing.

You'll forgive me but I, mean, it's in the Bible. 1 Kings 18, just read it for yourself. He actually says to them, "You know, he might be in the bathroom." No, that's the JDV translation of 1 Kings 18. In other words, "He's busy. He's relieving himself. He cannot hear you."

So finally, this goes on and then Elijah's like, "Okay my turn". He said, "Just so we're clear. So, there's no mistake here. Let's just pour a bunch of water on this thing." Then he calls fire down from



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heaven and God consumes that altar, that sacrifice. These prophets of Baal are freaking out and he kills the prophets of Baal.

Then it reaches the ears of one, Jezebel. This wicked, wicked woman married to this evil, evil King, Ahab. And she puts a contract out on his life and where does Elijah go? Oh, he runs for his life into a cave and hides out. That in and of itself is another topic for another time.

He actually, wants God to take his life. Yeah. that's it. I would argue that he is disenchanted with God. He feels like God has let him down. Here he has just defeated and slain the prophets of Baal. And now he was thinking, "Well, God, why didn't you take care of Jezebel? Why are you letting her do this to me after what just happened? And he's disappointed.

God didn't do what he thought God was going to do. Maybe that's you here today. So, now God is going to speak to him. But not in the way one might think. I picture Elijah as being one for the dramatic. I mean, throughout his life... I mean, he was a very passionate man. He was a powerful prophet.

I kind of get the impression that he was into fire. I'm just saying. I'm not suggesting he was a pyromaniac. I'm just saying that if God's going to speak to him? It would certainly be using fire. I mean, he just got done calling fire down from heaven, right? So, wouldn't it stand to reason that he would speak through fire? No.

So here he is in the cave. God appears to him. And it says, "He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord and behold the Lord passed by.' A great strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord. But! The Lord was not in the wind.

And after the wind, an earthquake. But! The Lord was not in the earthquake and after the earthquake, a fire." Oh! it's going to be the fire. This is Elijah we're talking about certainly God is going to be in the fire! Nope. "But the Lord was not in the fire and after the fire, a still small voice."

Here's what I'm thinking. We're prone to want the "big" and as such we're not listening for the "small". Our ears are turned to the loud and as such they're not tuned to the quiet. This quieting of our hearts.

By way of an example, recently, this is recent. Everything's off. It's just me and the Lord. Doors locked. Everything is on silent. Everything's shut down. Just, "Okay, Lord, speak. Speak." It took a



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while. I had to be patient. I know you know not what I speak of when it comes to patience. But just patiently waiting for the Lord to speak and he did. I don't think he could resist.

Seeing this opportunity now where after the fire, after the earthquake, after the noise, after everything has passed by. And been shut down. Now I've got your attention, I want to show you some things. I want to say something to you: Very personal, very prophetic, very profound, very powerful.

And he revealed something to me. It was an answer to something that I had been petitioning the throne concerning for quite some time. Do you know that I always know I've made a good decision when my only regret is? That I didn't make it sooner. And my only regret at that moment was that I didn't just do this sooner.

Shut everything off. Quiet everything down and just get alone with the Lord. Spend time with him and listen to what he has to say. You might be surprised what he has to say to you.

Imagine perhaps in your life that God has something for you. Something he wants to reveal to you but you're all over the place. You're busy going to and from. Busy about many things.

I think of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus and her sister, Martha. ... I know I'm a Martha. I'm very gracious to Martha because I feel her pain. I want you to know! "We got work to do!" In fact, Martha is getting mad at you "Marys". Well, Right? Isn't that what Martha did? "Jesus! Tell my sister to get up, get in the kitchen and help me! We got work to do in here!"

And never imagine Jesus with a harsh tone to his voice. He just said to her, "Martha, Martha!" Come on. You're killing me here. He didn't say that but you get the point. ... "Martha, what are you doing? Mary has chosen the better thing. You're not going to always have me here. The kitchen can wait! I'm here."

Mary is hanging on every word, listening to the voice of her Shepherd. The sheep know the voice of the shepherd. As he speaks into her life. I find it interesting that Jesus would say to Martha that it can't be taken away from her. What's so interesting about that is that what he was saying was, "What I'm doing here and what Mary is hearing here? Will never return void."

That kitchen work that you're doing? It's forgotten long after. Not this. This is the better thing. It's not saying that's a bad thing. This is just a better thing to sit at the feet of Jesus and let him speak into your life.



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I guess maybe I am supposed to go here. I asked the Lord about it earlier. Maybe the Lord wants to free you from the crushing weight of unforgiveness? And the only way he can minister to you, to do that, is to get you alone. Quiet. Still. So that he can minister that to you, speak that to you and free you from that.

Maybe it's a family member. Maybe it's a loved one. Maybe it's a husband, a wife and you've allowed this root of bitterness to germinate and sprout and it's destroying your life. It's destroying you! Not them even! You! And the Lord wants to free you from that.

I'll say it this way and it's really not, probably, the best way to say it. But God's got a problem not that God has problems. But if God had a problem, the problem would be that he wants to say something to us, minister something to us. But he has to first get our attention because our lives are so busy. The volume of our lives is so noisy.

So, the problem that God has, if you will, is that he's got to figure out a way to get you, by yourself. All to himself so that he can speak to you.

For Elijah, it had to be all dramatic and this whole thing with the prophets of Baal. He had to come to that place and he's in that cave. Now he's got Elijah's attention and now he's going to speak into Elijah's life. I think there's a lot of "Elijahs" in the body of Christ and God has to get our attention. So, he can speak into our lives.

Here's the second one. It's in verses 11 and 12. It's that we win the respect of outsiders. This is interesting and what makes it so interesting is that Paul says, "Make it your ambition! Aspire to this!"

Do you know there's nothing wrong with ambition? Selfish ambition: Problem! Ambition? No problem! To have a Godly ambition, to aspire to Godly things. He says here, "Make it your ambition." This should be your goal.

What's the goal? What should I make my ambition? Oh! To lead a quiet life and mind your own business. Oh, I could do a whole sermon on just that one right there. Mind your own business. Then he even takes it further. It says, "And work with your hands. So that you're not dependent on anybody. So that you win the respect."

I mean if you think about it? Isn't it true that a quiet life, a life like this where one minds their own business? Works hard as





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unto the Lord with all of their might for his glory? They just have this simplicity about them. This quietness about them. and they just have made it their ambition to live a quiet Godly life.

Does that not stand out in a world like we live in today? By the way, wouldn't the outsider, the non-believer, the world? When they're watching this? You don't think they're going to take notice? Do you know the Apostle Paul says that we are living epistles? We are living letters."

In other words, the letter of our lives is being read by the outsiders. They're reading the letter of our lives and they're asking two questions. You do know what those two questions are, right? We have talked about it quite often.

The first question the world is asking the Christian is: Is it real? Are you the "real deal"? Because I've met way too many Christians that are just, I mean, hypocrites. They're not real. They're not the real deal.

There's no difference between them and us on Monday morning. Oh, sure! On Sunday, driving to church with the family, hitting the kids in the back (of the car) before they pull up into the parking lot. Then they pull in parking lot, big smile, praise the Lord!

That's Sunday morning but you know what comes after Sunday morning? I know this is deeply profound. Monday morning and then Tuesday morning. So, they're asking, "Is it real?"

The second question is, "Does it work?" And here's the thing. They want you to be the real deal. They want it to work. Because if you are the real deal and it works? Then there's hope for them and they're watching us.

Those employees, if you're an employer. Those co-workers, they're watching you. They're reading the letter of your life. There's something peculiar about you. Something different about you and that's what "wins" them. Wins their respect. Now, I have earned the right to speak into their lives.

Many, many years ago when I was working for Mercedes-Benz. I had this older gentleman, quite older than I was. I was still in my 20's at the time and I had hair... But he was watching me and I knew he was watching me.

I'm the new kid on the block. I'm this young "whippersnapper" and he's the old veteran, been around the block a few times. And could





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tell you a thing or two "Sonny Boy". That kind of thing, it was just a weird dynamic.

Then his wife got the diagnosis. Do you know who he was asking to pray with him? He was asking me to pray with him, which means he was watching my life and asking those questions about my life. So, when that happens in his life? I had earned the right for him to come, I mean, greatly humbling himself.

I mean he was the number one guy. He had the seniority and the respect. I mean he was the man. Everybody aspired to be like him. Then, here I come. His kids are older than me and I come on to the scene. "Something different about this kid. Oh, I see what it is. Hmm."

See, when the non-believer takes notice of our lives and reads the letter of our lives. If what they read is the real deal? Then God is glorified in us. The non-believer will be attracted to us and they will want what we have.

One of the things as we were worshiping this morning that the Lord just reminded me of. It's a much-needed reminder. I needed to hear this. I still get a little bit, I don't want to say, "nervous". But the seriousness of this profound privilege that I have to stand behind this pulpit and preach and teach the Word of God. I mean, I take it very seriously. It's a very sober reality that I'm, sort of standing, on "holy" ground.

Sometimes my nerves might get the best of me? So, the Lord is so faithful. He just spoke to me, spoke to my heart, and said, "These people are not here to hear you." Oh God! Whew! Good thing! "They're here to hear me. That's why they're here. You're just the mouthpiece." Talk about taking the pressure off of me? I was like, "Thank you, lord! Okay! It's just... Speak then! I'll just be the mouthpiece and you speak through me."

Do you know what I love about when God does that? Often times, probably more often with me than others. He has you hear a different sermon than the one I preached and I praise God for that. Because, see, as I speak, He takes, by the Holy Spirit, and he fine-tunes the Word to that need in your heart. Because he sees your heart.

I'm only looking your outward appearance. By the way you all this morning you look marvelous. All of you! But God doesn't see the outward appearance. He sees your heart and he knows every need, of every heart, of everyone that is here.



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Because "His Word doesn't return void." He will take his Word and bless it to your heart, to your understanding, to your ears, to your eyes. So, he opens up the "eyes of your understanding". He opens up your ears, he opens up your heart, and then you are taught. Like the Thessalonians who were taught to love in this way.

I want to close with one more quote from Chuck Swindoll.  
But before I forget because I do forget.

Another thing the Lord was ministering to me today out of Galatians was Galatians 5:22. You know well as the "fruit ", singular, of the Holy Spirit. But why is it not "fruits" of the Holy Spirit?

No, it's fruit, singular, of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because the fruit, singular, is love. And if you love, that way, as they did one for another? Do you know what comes from the "fruit of love"? Oh... Joy, peace, kindness...

This is the time of the year where we make all those resolutions. I stopped doing that, by the way. Because about January 3rd, I'd already have blown it. So, now what I do, is I just pray and say, "Lord..."

Like for example, this year I want to be: A kinder pastor, a kinder father, and a kinder husband. So, I asked the Lord, "Make me more kind". I want to be kinder. Well, how am I going to be kinder? By way of the fruit of love. Because when you love and God "bears the fruit of love" in your life.

Then what comes as a result of that love is kindness, and meekness, and gentleness. I want to be more gentle. "Lord, make me more of a gentle man. Gentlemen, do you know that where that comes from? I know this is again very deeply profound, right? Gentlemen, gentle men? Are you a gentle man? I want to be more gentle.

Chuck Swindoll writes, "When I keep my hands out of things, his will is accomplished. His name is exalted and his glory is magnified." Do you want people to be attracted to the Lord in your life? Then quiet down and turn down the volume of your life. And watch what God will do.

Let's pray. Father, thank you. Lord, if we would but take even a fraction of the amount of time that we spend in front of the TV or social media. And just spend it with you? I wonder how dramatic of a change there would be in our lives? Lord, I'm speaking of myself. Lord, I wonder, just even a fraction, in some cases it might be hours. I wonder what change would come.



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Lord, we want to do that. I don't think there's a one of us here that doesn't want that? But there's no way that, in and of ourselves, we can do that. Unless you, by the Holy Spirit, enable us to do it. We pray that you will. In Jesus name. Amen.