

Subject: Values, Virtues, and Victory: Living Out Our Faith Together

Dear Church Family,

I hope this message finds you walking closely with the Lord and experiencing His peace in your daily life. This past Sunday, we started examining Paul's closing encouragements and exhortations regarding the church being a vibrant in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18. For those wanting to dig deeper still, we have some great devotional and other discipleship materials [[HERE](#)].

Summary: The sermon explored Paul's timeless instructions for Christian attitude and conduct within the church body. In our increasingly fractured and divided society, Paul's message about unity, mutual accountability, and God-honoring relationships is more relevant than ever. We examined how our internal heart condition (attitude) must align with our external actions (countenance) to produce genuine Christian conduct. The message focused on three critical areas: our relationship with spiritual leadership, our conduct toward one another, and the virtues of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving that should characterize our church family.

Takeaways:

1. Honor and Support Spiritual Leadership: God calls us to recognize, respect, and esteem those He has placed in leadership—not based on personal preferences, but because they are doing God's work. This includes praying for leaders, receiving their teaching with humility, following their Godly examples, and maintaining biblical accountability while avoiding slander or unnecessary accusations.
2. Practice Biblical Love Through Accountability: True Christian love means speaking truth in love, even when it's uncomfortable. We are called to warn the unruly, comfort the discouraged, support the weak, be patient with everyone, and always pursue what is good. Ignoring a brother or sister's unbiblical conduct is actually disobedience to God and a failure to love them well.
3. Cultivate Joy, Prayer, and Thanksgiving in All Circumstances: Regardless of our circumstances—whether on mountaintops or in valleys—we have reason to rejoice because we possess eternal life in Christ. We should pray unceasingly, taking advantage of our 24/7 access to the God of the universe. And we can give thanks in everything, not necessarily for everything, but because Jesus remains on the throne no matter what we face.

As we move forward this week, I encourage you to prayerfully consider where God might be calling you to grow in these areas. Are you honoring leadership as God

intends? Are you lovingly holding others accountable while remaining humble yourself?
Are you living with visible joy, active prayer, and genuine thanksgiving?

Remember, the embedded fourth virtue in all of this is obedience. We have the opportunity to please and honor God by surrendering, submitting, and obeying Him in all these areas.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Jim

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Values, Virtues, & Victory – Part 1

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

I. Introduction: One Nation Under God

1. This is one of those passages that has something for everyone as Paul is considering the church's attitude and conduct. *As we read from v12 through the close of the book, we get the sense that Paul is offering both correction and vision for how the church is to function* as God knits together those with vastly different experiences, talents, gifts, and personality in what He intends be a supernatural singleness of Spirit, purpose, and mission.
2. The reality is that we live in an increasingly secular country fractured by hundreds, likely thousands, of political factions that no longer 'fight' about how to achieve shared objectives and common goals, but about the fundamental direction and destination of our republic. *This terminal disease of disunity has roared into every part of American society, including the church.* As a result, Paul's message is just as timely today as the day he penned it...for it calls us to a BHAG – a BIG HOLY AUDACIOUS GOAL of renewing our marriages, our families, our church, our community, and our nation for the Glory of Christ!
3. Today, we will consider the first four of Paul's virtues about God-honoring unity in the church, including our shared relationships and responsibilities regarding leadership, others, and thanks-filled obedience.

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This is NOT a unity for the sake of unity, but a high calling of surrender to the supernatural unity found in our living out the Gospel of Truth...*a unity with the One that birthed our nation and has seen us through 250 tumultuous years marked by continual rebirth for His glory.*

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[VIDEO]

Today, in a nation that is again at the crossroads of divide, we cry out to you oh, Heavenly Father. [Bring healing we pray](#). Bring a renewed sense of awe of your righteousness and goodness. [Bring beauty from the ashes of fear, selfishness, hatred, and division](#). We pray you will turn our hearts toward You...again. [We pray that we, Your church, will be your light of freedom and truth in calling our children and our nation to the hope of our Messiah, Jesus](#). It is in His name we pray this...and all of His people said, amen!

4. One final opening point. [As we do a heart check of Christian values and virtues leading to Godly victory, I want to offer you a couple of definitions to hold onto today](#). These definitions address both the inward of who we are and the outward of how we represent the inward:

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A. **Attitude** represents the internal state of our hearts and mind.

B. **Countenance** is the external reflection of our hearts and minds.

Read entire passage

Done according to God's will, we can think of these as being Christian conduct.

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II. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13: Spiritual Leadership Matters

1. Before getting into this, I want to note that I very much count my pastoring here as a huge blessing from God. [This teaching is not meant to be corrective, but calling us up further into God's plan](#). That said, some may note needed corrective action in their lives. [The simple principle in view today is to do all we do as unto the Lord](#). No Christian is perfect, including leadership, and so we are to always walk in grace with pleasing God and bringing Him glory front-and-center in our lives.
2. Spiritual leaders, including elders, pastors, staff, and many lay-leaders share many duties and responsibilities toward fulfilling God's plan for His church. [This group is to be God's agents in](#)

caring for, leading, protecting, and discipling the church to be about the will of the Father. We do this by teaching, encouraging, and living out sound doctrine & Godly character, guarding against false teachers, praying, correcting, encouraging, worshipping, and otherwise maintaining unity in our shared mission of edifying the church and proclaiming the Gospel with our mouths, hands, and feet.

3. While certainly not exhaustive, the table up on your screen offers some Scriptural references for leaderships various duties, responsibilities, and qualifications:

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Role	Core Responsibilities/Qualifications	Key Scriptures
Elders/Pastors	Teaching, shepherding, equipping Oversight, doctrine, theology	Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Eph 4:11-12; 2 Tim 4:2 Acts 6:1-6; 1 Peter 5:1-4
Deacons/Lay-Leaders	Practical service, discipleship & ministry services, unity support	Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2
Staff	Ministry support and administration	Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor 4:2; 2 Tim 2:2; Acts 6:3; Ja 1:5, 4:6; Phil 2:3-5

4. While given a title, a title is not a qualification of a Spiritual Leader, nor is one's personal glory. **Instead, leaders are to be:**
- A. Anointed and gifted by God (Eph 4) with a heart for God (Acts 20:28)
 - B. Competent in their role
 - C. Servant-hearted, not authoritarian
 - D. Godly character-driven, not personality-driven
 - E. Grounded in Scripture
 - F. Focused on equipping others
 - G. Humble, Teachable, and Accountable before God
 - H. Bold, grace-filled, compassionate, and forgiving in being God's vessel to mature the body of Christ

5. I am grateful that God has placed so many wonderful, willing, and faithful people in our church family. **We are truly blessed beyond measure.** We have men and women that are not self-seeking nor functioning with their personal gain in mind – they are here for their love and obedience of Jesus. **They meet God’s word here for “labor” found in v12 as they toil and strive to the point of becoming weary working on our behalf.**

6. While it is God’s part to raise up anointed leaders, Paul notes that the body’s part is to recognize those who He has placed in leadership over them. **The body is to esteem them highly in love because they are doing God’s work AND NOT because they do what you want or because of any personal preferences you may have.** Let’s unpack these a little further.

7. The word for “**recognize**” in v12 means “to see the merit of someone”, to respect them, and to honor them – which itself is a gift from God. As Paul says in **1 Corinthians 2:14** “**But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.**”
 - A. What’s more, “recognize” carries with it the duty of helping leadership in discharging their God-given responsibilities and duties. **As church family members, your obedience to God includes:**

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- i. (1) Biblical submission to Godly leadership (He 13:17; 1 Pe 5:5; Eph 5:21);

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- ii. (2) **Praying for those that carry leadership responsibilities and spiritual warfare** (1 Thes 5:25; He 13:18; Eph 6:18-20);

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- iii. (3) Following their Godly examples (He 13:7; 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17, Eph 4:11-16; 1 Pe 4:10; Ro 12:4-8);

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- iv. (4) **Receiving their teaching, admonishments, and discipleship with humility** (Ja 1:21-22; Acts 2:42; 2 Tim 4:2-4; Heb 12:11; Pro 12:1);

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- v. (5) Supporting leaders financially and practically (Gal 6:6; 1 Cor 9:13-14; 1 Tim 5:17-18);

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- vi. (6) **Avoiding unnecessary accusations or slander** (1 Tim 5:19; Exod 20:16; Eph 4:31);

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- vii. (7) Holding them biblically accountable (1 Tim 5:20; Gal 2:11-14; Acts 17:11); and

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- viii. (8) **Maintaining unity** (Eph 4:1-3; Ro 12:18; 1 Cor 1:10).

- 8. One final point. **We read that we are to be at peace among the body.** This is NOT the world's peace, but God's peace found when the body and leadership are obediently following Christ's leadership.

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III. 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15: Christian Conduct Toward Others

- 1. In these verses Paul shifts his focus from the body's relationship with leadership to the body's relationships with one another. **The central principal being relayed is that we are to be holding one another accountable for our Christian conduct.**
- 2. As we read Paul's list, we are reminded that the body of Christ is very diverse with assorted challenges, gifts, personalities, skills, preferences, backgrounds, training, and priorities. **Taken as a whole, we see they are completely incompatible and yet God knits us together as a cohesive body of believers fully expecting and positioning us in giving Him glory.**

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When thought of this way, we see our desperate need for God's supernatural power, presence, and gifts. **In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, we read that we are supernaturally bound by a common Spirit,**

common faith, common trust, common hope, and that we are members of Christ's body and of one another.

3. Let's dig a little deeper into the ones that offer us the biggest challenges.

A. First, "warn those who are unruly". The Greek word translated "unruly" refers to those that are disorderly, undisciplined, or lazy. Right out of the gates, Paul is saying that the body is to confront one another where we are falling short. This is what Godly love does... **Proverbs 27:5-6** says: "Open rebuke is better, Than love carefully concealed. ⁶Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." **AND Ephesians 4:15** says we are to 'speak the truth in love'.

Frankly, ignoring or even gossiping about a brother or sister's un-Christian conduct is one of the least loving things we can do. Being silent is actually disobedience to God and sin against our family.

- i. Now, I have been around long enough to hear just about all the reasons why you can't confront someone...to which I have a simple response – 'show me the verse'.
- ii. I have also been around long enough to remind the one being "warned" that it is unbiblical to reflexively respond with (1) attacking the bearer of the warning, (2) some sort of "if you really loved me" or "don't judge me", (3) self-condemnation, or (4) some other less-than-humble-and-less-than-grace-filled response. Let us, the body of Christ, be focused on pleasing God as we function in Biblical unity for His good purposes.

B. Second, we are not to look down upon nor enable the discouraged, the timid, or weak. Instead, we are to see them as children of the living God and help them grow in maturity by our being kind, gentle, determined, discerning, and wise in speaking Christ into their lives.

C. Third, we are to be patient with one another for we all are broken and in need of more of Jesus. **Please don't hear this as not speaking up...it is that our hearts and conduct are to remain for them.**

D. Finally, the Christian is called to holiness and righteousness. **He or she is to testify of our Lord in heart and countenance by always 'doing the next right thing'.** We are not to return evil with evil, but to take the high-road of loving even the unlovable. **We are to continuously invite others to follow us as we remain about the business of God.**

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IV. 1 Thessalonians 5:16: Joyful, Prayerful, and Thankful...3 Virtues of the Church *Note: there are others.*

A brief reminder that Paul is talking about these virtues being visible in and across the church family as public expressions of our faith and transformation in Jesus.

1. Christian, rejoice always. **This is one of the blessings of the freedom found only in Christ Jesus.** Being blessed...rejoice. **In a quiet or uncertain season...rejoice.** Being sifted like Job...rejoice. **Bad job...rejoice.** Broken relationship...rejoice. **Being persecuted...rejoice.** Under great spiritual attacks...rejoice.

A. Consider for just a moment all of the investments of your time and treasure in the things of this life. **Vocation, home, phone, vehicle, education, hobbies, exercise, music, social media, clothing, vacations, stuff...the list is endless.**

Yet, how many of them [as well as the sufferings of this life] offer the joy of knowing you have secured eternal life with Christ...**no matter one, some, all, you are a child of the Living God and have the hope and love of eternal life with Him.** So, keep the wounds, blessings, and distractions in perspective Christian and REJOICE!

- i. In **John 16:22**, Jesus says no one can take His joy from you.
 - ii. According to **2 Corinthians 6:10**, one may live a life full of suffering and little or nothing materially, yet possess all things...of real value.
 - iii. In **Romans 5:3**, we read how the Lord uses the hard things of this life to build our Christian character and produce the hope that brings us to rejoice.
2. In v17, Paul says we are to pray unceasingly. *Imagine the God of the universe gave us a hotline to talk with Him 24x7 and He says "use it" continuously. He loves and values you so very much that He died that you may have this access. He values your prayers and wants a personal relationship with you.* As noted last week, our prayers should yield to and reflect the heart of the Holy Spirit as we pray in the Spirit.
- A. I am so grateful that prayer is such a central part of our ministry here at Calvary Chapel Aiken. *Our Sunday evening Encounter Prayer service, home fellowships, bible studies, and our weeks of prayer all speak of our hearts for prayer.* For any NOT actively involved in body prayer activities, this verse is a clear exhortation for you to purpose in getting involved.
3. Finally, we as a church family are to give thanks in everything. *No matter if our circumstances are on the mountaintops, in the valleys, or somewhere in between, we have the hope, presence, power, and love of Christ in our lives...we have all that matters and so we can give thanks, not for everything, but in everything. We can ALWAYS give thanks that Jesus is on the throne!*

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V. Closing: A Fourth Virtue

1. I want to close by noting an embedded fourth virtue...that of obedience. *Whether with leadership, with each other, or in living out the will of God in the three virtues of rejoicing, praying, and*

thanking Him, we are given the opportunity in pleasing and bringing God honor by surrendering, submitting, and obeying Him OR NOT!

[Prayer – BHAG: marriage, family, church, community, and nation all for the glory of God]

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Values, Virtues, & Victory – Part 1

I. Introduction: One Nation Under God

- Attitude + Countenance = Christian Conduct

II. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13: Spiritual Leadership Matters

- Central leadership duties, responsibilities, and character
- Recognizing, including your part in helping leaders

Additional Scripture References: 1 Cor 2:14

III. 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15: Christian Conduct Toward Others

- The church is a supernatural expression of God where incompatible people are knit together in His power for His glory
- While God does the knitting, we have our part to do as well...surrender, submission, and obedience

Additional Scripture References: 1 Cor 12:12-27; Prov 27:5-6; Eph 4:15

IV. 1 Thessalonians 5:16: Joyful, Prayerful, and Thankful...3 Virtues of the Church

- Rejoice, Pray, & Thanks

Additional Scripture References: Jn 16:22; 2 Cor 6:10; Ro 5:3

V. Closing: A Fourth Virtue

- Obedience

5-Day Devotional

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Values, Virtues, and Victory

Day 1: Honoring Spiritual Leadership

Reading: 1 Thes 5:12-13, Heb 13:7, Heb 13:17

Devotional: God places spiritual leaders in our lives not for their glory, but for our growth. These shepherds labor tirelessly, often unseen, carrying the weight of prayer, protection, and guidance for the body of Christ. Today, reflect on how you view those God has positioned over you. Do you recognize their God-given role with gratitude? Do you support them through prayer and encouragement? Leadership is not about personal preference or performance that pleases us—it's about God's anointing for His purposes. Your biblical submission, prayer support, and humble receptivity to godly teaching are acts of worship. When you honor God's leaders, you honor God Himself.

Commit today to pray specifically for your spiritual leaders and express tangible appreciation for their faithful service.

Day 2: Speaking The Truth in Love Reading: 1 Thes 5:14, Eph 4:15, Prov 27:5-6

Devotional: True Christian love doesn't ignore sin or dysfunction—it courageously addresses it with grace. Warning the unruly, comforting the discouraged, and supporting the weak require both boldness and tenderness. Silence in the face of a brother or sister's spiritual struggle is not kindness; it's neglect. God calls us to be faithful friends who speak truth wrapped in love. This means humbly confronting what hinders spiritual growth while maintaining compassion and patience. Consider: Is there someone you've avoided confronting out of fear or discomfort? Conversely, when corrected, do you receive it with humility or defensiveness? The body of Christ matures when we commit to honest, loving accountability.

Ask God for wisdom and courage to be both a faithful warner and a humble receiver of godly correction.

Day 3: Rejoice Always

Reading: 1 Thes 5:16, Rom 5:3-5, Phil 4:4-7

Devotional: "Rejoice always" seems impossible when circumstances crush us. Yet Paul commands this joy not because life is easy, but because Christ is sufficient. Christian joy isn't dependent on favorable conditions—it's rooted in eternal realities. You are a child of the Living God. Your salvation is secure. Your future is guaranteed. No job loss, broken relationship, health crisis, or persecution can steal what Christ has given you. This world's investments—career, possessions, comfort—are temporary. But knowing Jesus? That's forever.

Today, inventory what consumes your emotional energy. Are you more affected by temporary circumstances than eternal truths? Choose to rejoice not for your situation, but in your Savior. Let perspective shift your countenance. When you rejoice in trials, you testify that Jesus is enough, and that testimony brings Him glory.

Day 4: Pray Without Ceasing Reading: 1 Thes 5:17, Rom 8:26-27, Eph 6:18-20

Devotional: The God of the universe invites you into continuous conversation. Prayer isn't a religious duty—it's relational intimacy with your Father who loves you desperately. He values your voice, your concerns, your worship, and your intercession. Unceasing prayer means maintaining an ongoing awareness of God's presence throughout your day—talking with Him in the car, at work, during mundane tasks, in crisis and celebration alike. The Holy Spirit helps you pray according to God's will, transforming your requests to align with His heart. Evaluate your prayer life honestly. Is it sporadic or sustained? Individual or communal? God has given you access; will you use it?

Commit today to joining corporate prayer gatherings in your church family. Pray for your leaders, your brothers and sisters, and the lost. Let prayer become your spiritual breathing—constant, life-giving, essential.

Day 5: Give Thanks In Everything Reading: 1 Thes 5:18, Psa 103:1-5, Col 3:15-17

Devotional: Gratitude transforms perspective. Paul doesn't command thanksgiving for everything—some circumstances are genuinely terrible—but in everything. Even in valleys, you can thank God that Jesus reigns, that His promises are true, that His presence never leaves you. Thanksgiving is an act of faith that declares God's goodness despite contrary evidence. It shifts focus from what's lacking to who is present. When you give thanks in hardship, you testify that God is bigger than your circumstances.

Today, practice deliberate gratitude. List five things you're thankful for—include both blessings and lessons learned through difficulty. Thank God that He's using all things for your good and His glory. Let thanksgiving become your default response, not because everything is good, but because God is always good. A thankful heart is a worshipful heart, and worship ushers you into God's presence where true joy resides.

Small Group Study Guide

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Values, Virtues, and Victory

Opening Prayer: Pray that the Lord would open your eyes to see and understand His word as you discuss the sermon.

Key Takeaways: Query the group for takeaways first...you may stay with one or more of those.

1. Spiritual Leadership Matters - God calls us to recognize, respect, and support those He has placed in spiritual leadership.
2. Christian Conduct Toward Others - We are responsible for holding one another accountable in love while supporting the weak and discouraged.
3. Three Essential Virtues - Rejoicing always, praying unceasingly, and giving thanks in everything are marks of a transformed life.
4. Obedience is Central - All these values require our active submission to God's will.

Discussion Questions: Did the Holy Spirit prompt any questions with you? Start with those.

1. Review the leadership responsibilities table from the sermon. Which responsibilities surprise you or challenge your previous understanding?
2. How does viewing leadership as "God's agents" rather than personal preference change your perspective?
3. Of the seven ways listed to support spiritual leadership (biblical submission, prayer, following examples, receiving teaching, financial support, avoiding slander, maintaining unity), which comes most naturally to you? Which is most challenging?
4. Share an example of how praying for your leaders has impacted your relationship with them or the church.
5. Have you ever struggled with submitting to spiritual authority? What was at the root of that struggle?

6. How can we distinguish between healthy accountability of leaders and sinful criticism or gossip?
7. Why do you think confronting someone in love is so difficult for most people? What fears or obstacles hold us back?
8. The sermon mentioned common excuses for not confronting others and poor responses to being confronted. Which resonates with your experience?
9. How can we create a culture where "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) is normalized and received with humility?
10. What's the difference between helping someone and enabling them? How do we discern which is needed?
11. Share about a time when someone showed you patience during a difficult season. How did that impact you?

Practical Applications: Query the group for applications first...you may explore one or more of those.

1. Leadership Support:
 - a. Commit to praying daily for your pastor and church leaders this week
 - b. Send an encouraging note or message to someone in leadership
 - c. Identify one way you can practically support the ministry
2. Accountability Partner:
 - a. Identify one area where you need someone to "warn" you or hold you accountable
 - b. Ask a trusted brother or sister in Christ to speak into that area of your life
 - c. Commit to receiving their input with humility and grace
3. The Three Virtues:
 - a. Set three daily reminders on your phone: one to rejoice, one to pray, one to give thanks
 - b. Journal each day about how you practiced these three virtues
 - c. Share your experiences with the group next week
4. Loving Confrontation:
 - a. If the Holy Spirit has been prompting you to speak truth to someone, prayerfully prepare to do so this week
 - b. Review Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1 for biblical guidance
 - c. Ask someone to pray with you before and after the conversation

Closing Prayer Points:

- For hearts of humility and obedience
- For your church leaders
- For courage to speak truth in love
- For supernatural joy, consistent prayer, and grateful hearts
- For specific needs shared in the group

Discussion Questions

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Values, Virtues, and Victory

1. How does the current cultural disunity in America mirror or differ from the divisions Paul addressed in the Thessalonian church, and what can we learn from his approach?
2. In what ways might our internal attitude differ from our external countenance, and how can we ensure both honor God in our Christian conduct?
3. What practical steps can church members take to biblically support and submit to spiritual leadership while also holding them accountable according to Scripture?
4. Why do you think confronting a fellow believer in their sin is described as one of the most loving things we can do, and what prevents us from doing this well?
5. How can we distinguish between enabling someone who is weak or discouraged versus genuinely helping them grow in spiritual maturity?
6. What does it mean to rejoice always when facing genuine suffering or persecution, and how is this different from toxic positivity or denial of pain?
7. In what areas of your life do you find it most difficult to give thanks in everything rather than for everything, and why might God call us to this distinction?
8. How does viewing prayer as a 24/7 hotline to God change your perspective on the frequency and nature of your conversations with Him?
9. What role does obedience play in our ability to experience the virtues of joy, prayerfulness, and thankfulness that Paul describes?
10. How might the church better demonstrate supernatural unity despite vast differences in experiences, talents, gifts, and personalities among its members?

Dinner Conversation Starters

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Values, Virtues, and Victory

1. Honoring Leadership and Authority

How do we, as a family, show respect and support for the spiritual leaders God has placed in our lives (pastors, elders, teachers)? What are some practical ways we could pray for and encourage them this week?

2. Speaking Truth in Love

What do you think it looks like to “warn the unruly” or lovingly confront someone who’s heading in the wrong direction? How can we do that in our own family without being harsh or defensive?

3. Responding to Weakness and Discouragement

When someone in our home is struggling—discouraged, scared, or feeling weak—what usually happens? How could we better “comfort the fainthearted” and “uphold the weak” with patience and kindness?

4. Choosing Joy, Prayer, and Thankfulness

Paul calls us to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything. Which of these three is hardest for you right now, and why? What is one specific change we could each make this week to grow in that area?

5. Not Returning Evil for Evil

Can you think of a recent time when someone treated you unfairly or unkindly? How did you respond, and how might you have responded differently if you were focused on “always pursue what is good for one another and for all”?

Family Conversation Guide for Children & Early Teens
1 Thessalonians 5:12-18
Values, Virtues, and Victory

AGES 5-7: SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Learning to Respect Leaders**: “Recognize and esteem” those who lead you (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Use kind words and good listening ears with teachers, parents, and church helpers. Do what they ask the first time, not after arguing or complaining.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) What would it look like to show respect to your teacher in that moment?
 - (b) If your friends start laughing at the teacher, what could you do instead of joining in?
 - (c) How can you show respect to your parents when they say “screen time is over” and you want to keep playing?
2. **Being Kind When Others Are Mean**: “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone” (1 Thess. 5:15). When someone is unkind, you don’t have to be unkind back. You can walk away, tell an adult, or say something kind.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) Is there a difference between walking away to be safe and being mean back?
 - (b) How would Jesus want you to act if someone is unkind on a game or in a cartoon chat?
3. **Thankful Hearts in Everyday Life**: “Give thanks in everything” (1 Thess. 5:18). Say “thank you” to God for good things and even when things don’t go your way. Practice thanking God before bed for three things, even on hard days.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) Even though you feel upset, what are three things you could still thank God for?
- (b) How might saying “thank you” change how your heart feels?
- (c) How can you show on your face (your countenance) that you’re trying to be thankful, even when disappointed?

AGES 8-12: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Respecting and Supporting Leaders...When You Don’t Agree**: Honor spiritual and other leaders; help them do their job (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Speak respectfully about pastors, teachers, coaches, and parents—whether in person, in texts, or in group chats. Pray for them when they make decisions you don’t like.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) What’s the difference between a harmless joke and disrespecting authority?
- (b) What could you say in the chat that shows respect without sounding “self-righteous”?

- (c) If you don't know what to say, is it sometimes better to not "like" or "react" at all? Why?

2. **Helping Friends Do the Right Thing:** "Warn those who are unruly" and "speak the truth in love" (1 Thess. 5:14; Eph. 4:15). When a friend is cheating in a game, lying online, or being mean, don't just ignore it. Lovingly say something or ask an adult for help if it's serious.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) What might it look like to "speak the truth in love" in that chat?
- (b) How could you message your friend privately in a way that's honest but kind?
- (c) When should you involve an adult if things don't get better?

3. **Responding With Good Not Getting Even:** "Always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all" (1 Thess. 5:15). When someone embarrasses you at school or online, don't plan a "payback." Choose to protect others' reputation instead of exposing their worst moments.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) What does "doing the next right thing" look like in that moment?
- (b) Would sharing their secret make things better or worse—for them and for you?
- (c) How might choosing not to get even show that you follow Jesus?

AGES 11-15: DEEPENING THE CONNECTION APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Showing Honor Online:** Recognize and esteem leaders; support them, not tear them down (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Refuse to share or like posts/memes that mock pastors, teachers, or parents—especially in group chats or social media. If there's a real concern, talk to a trusted adult face-to-face, not by gossiping online.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) How does joining in—even with just a laughing emoji—affect your heart toward that leader?
- (b) What's one way you could gently redirect the conversation or choose not to participate?
- (c) How might you address a real concern about a leader in a biblical way instead of in a group chat?

2. **Calling Out Wrong Without Canceling People:** Warn the idle/unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all (1 Thess. 5:14). Don't "cancel" people when they mess up; confront with truth and grace. Distinguish between someone being "toxic" and someone who is immature and needs help.

Discussion Questions:

- (a) How could you privately message someone to confront their behavior while still showing you care about them as a person?
- (b) How can you "uphold the weak" while still saying what they did was wrong?

3. Responding to Drama and Hurt Without Revenge: Don't repay evil for evil; pursue what is good for all (1 Thess. 5:15). When drama blows up (rumors, screenshots, subtweets), resist the urge to fight fire with fire. Decide ahead of time: "I won't expose someone's secrets or post out of anger."

Discussion Questions:

- (a) What are some "revenge options" you might be tempted to use—and what damage would each do?
- (b) What would "doing the next right thing" look like in this situation, even if others don't?
- (c) How could you set boundaries (block, leave chats, talk in person) while still refusing to get even?

Tips for Parents

- Be patient and listen: Give your child time to think and respond.
- Relate to everyday life: Use real-life examples and stories familiar to your child to make abstract concepts more tangible.
- Encourage questions: Let your son or daughter know it's okay to ask questions, even if things don't make sense right away.
- Share personal insights: Tell a personal story about a time you experienced these themes, adapting as needed for age appropriateness.

Family Conversation Guide for Gen Z
1 Thessalonians 5:12-18
Values, Virtues, and Victory

1. Honoring Leaders Instead of Roasting Them

Bible Reference: 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 – “Recognize those who labor among you... and esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”

Application: Honor your pastors, parents, teachers, and leaders—especially in how you talk about them in group chats, posts, and memes. If there’s a real concern, deal with it biblically, not by gossip or sarcasm.

Scenario: Your youth group has a group chat. People are dropping memes making fun of your youth pastor’s preaching style and your leader’s awkward habits. It feels “normal” and funny, and everyone is reacting with laughing emojis.

Discussion: How can you show respect for your leaders in that chat—without acting self-righteous—and what could you do differently if you’ve already joined in on roasting them?

2. Calling Out Wrong Without Canceling People

Bible Reference: 1 Thessalonians 5:14 – “Warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”

Application: When a friend is clearly doing something sinful or harmful (online or offline), don’t just ignore it or cancel them. Lovingly confront them, offering truth and support, not silence or public shaming.

Scenario: A close friend is posting cruel comments on someone’s TikTok and sharing a mocking story about a classmate. Most people are either laughing along or quietly watching.

Discussion: What could you say privately to your friend that both clearly calls out their behavior as wrong and shows that you still care about them as a person? If you lost this relationship because you honored Jesus, would it be worth it in light of eternity? Why?

3. Choosing Not to Get Even

Bible Reference: 1 Thessalonians 5:15 – “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”

Application: When you're hurt, humiliated, or betrayed—even digitally—you refuse revenge. You don't leak screenshots, expose secrets, or clap back for likes. You choose the “next right thing” that seeks peace and integrity.

Scenario: A private conversation you had with a friend is screenshotted and shared in another group chat to make you look bad. Friends urge you to “expose” that person with your own receipts.

Discussion: What does it look like, practically, to “pursue what is good” in that moment instead of trying to hurt them back, and how might that protect your witness for Christ?

4. Joy That Is Not Based on Likes, Followers, or FOMO

Bible Reference: 1 Thessalonians 5:16 – “Rejoice always...”

Application: Let your joy be rooted in Jesus—not in being invited, noticed, or validated online. When comparison or FOMO hits, consciously shift your focus from people's highlight reels to God's unchanging love for you.

Scenario: You open Instagram or Snapchat and see a group of friends hanging out without you. They post all night. You feel left out, insecure, and start wondering what's wrong with you.

Discussion: In that moment, what specific truths about who you are in Christ can you focus on—and how could that help you “rejoice” instead of spiraling into jealousy or self-hate?

These points aim to empower Gen Z to live out their faith genuinely and courageously in various aspects of their daily lives, reflecting Biblical integrity, compassion, and steadfastness.