



SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR CONNECT GROUPS

23 & 24 JULY 2022

“STEWARDSHIP THROUGH PRESENCE”

1 THESSALONIANS 2.17-18, 3.9-13

Suggestions for Making the Most of your Group Time

1. Begin by reviewing the video of the sermon, preferably before you meet together (see <http://www.brmc.org.sg/category/resources/sermons>).
2. Read the Scripture passage together, before entering into discussion.
3. Spend time on both question components, namely:
 - a. Comprehension (*Who? What? When? Why? How?*);
 - b. Application / Transformation (*So what? What action should I take? Perspective should I adopt? Value should I uphold? Emotion should I embrace? Habit should I develop? Desire should I nurture? etc*)
4. Discuss as few or as many questions as best fits your group’s current context and present stage in life.
5. Before ending your group session, allocate some time (15-20 min) to pray with and for one another.

Discussion Questions

1. From your review of the sermon and your reading of the Scripture passage, recap the key points of this sermon.
2. In this week's Scripture text, why does the Apostle Paul describe his desire to be physically present with the Thessalonian Christians in such serious and emotionally-intense language? How would you describe your desire to physically gather and assemble as Christ's disciples?
3. What does Paul want to do when he is present with the Thessalonian Christians face to face? (Hint: see 3.10). What are some things you could do, in order to be fully present with fellow Christians?
4. Read 1 Thess 3.12 again. In what practical ways can you lovingly steward the gift of presence "for one another and for all"? (If you would like to serve as hospitality befrienders together as a CG, sign up at <http://brmcsq.churchcenter.com/people/forms/413172>)

Prayer Items

5. Pray for one another, that we would be empowered by God to live out the specific areas of application and transformation raised during the discussion time. Pray also for any needs that were mentioned.

Further Background Information

Why did the early Christians gather?

The Apostle Paul's deep love and concern for the Christians in Thessalonica can be seen in 1 Thess 2:17-3:13. Here, Paul and his missionary colleagues describe their great desire to see the young Christians in person again (2:17-20). They speak of their joy and encouragement upon hearing the church's steadfastness in the Lord despite their absence (3:1-13). Paul and his colleagues loved the Thessalonian Christians so much, they exuberantly described the latter as their hope, joy, and crown of boasting before the Lord.

For the early Christians, gathering to share mutual presence was very important. In fact, "church" translates the Greek word *ekklesia*. And every ancient Greek speaker knew that *ekklesia* denotes an assembly of persons gathered for a shared purpose. The church is a gathered people.

But what was the purpose of the early Christians in gathering physically? Luke's account in Acts 2:42-47 gives us a glimpse. Acts 2:42 highlights three key areas to which the early believers devoted themselves:

- (1) To the apostles' teaching about the gospel of Jesus Christ, who was revealed in all the Scriptures, cf. Luke 24:27.
- (2) To *koinonia*, that is mutual sharing. This included sharing of spiritual bread (the apostolic teaching of the gospel), sharing of physical bread (both the Lord's Supper and regular meals), and sharing of money and provisions for the needy.
- (3) To prayer. (Recall last week's sermon on Stewardship through Prayer.)

The early Christians' stewardship in prayer and presence described in Acts 2:42 were not ends in themselves, but resulted in individual, corporate, and community transformation as they loved each other through their gifts and service (Acts 2:44-45).

As the early Christians were present to and for one another, so the Holy Spirit was also present with them, enabling them to faithfully love God and their neighbours, and to bear witness about Jesus.

These reasons for gathering together and being present to one another - aren't they still as relevant for us 21st century Christians?