

I THESSALONIANS 5:12-15

"LIVING IN GOD'S FAMILY "

It's true. Nothing, absolutely¹ nothing on this earth is more important to us when the chips are down than the members of our family. Do everything possible to cultivate those relationships.

Author, J. Allan Petersen, writing on this very subject, tells of a traumatic experience he endured that drilled this fact home. It happened on an airplane. What do you think would be your last thought, your last unscheduled thought and word if you knew that in a minute or two your life was over...?

Let's put this in context....Every nook and cranny of the big 747 was crowded. It took off in the middle of the night in Brazil where I'd been speaking. As it moved into the night I began to doze. I don't know how long I slept, but I was starting to wake when I heard a strong voice announcing, "We have a very serious emergency." Three engines had gone because of fuel contamination, and the other engine would go any second. The steward said in English, "Now you must do exactly as we tell you. Don't anyone think of doing anything we do not suggest. Your life depends on us. We are trained for your safety, so you must do exactly as we tell you." Then he rattled off in Portuguese. Everybody looked soberly at one another.

The steward said, "Now pull down the curtains, in a few minutes we are going to turn off all the lights."

My thought exclaimed, "Lord." The plane veered and banked, as the crew tried to get it back to the airport. The steward ran up and down the aisle and barked out orders. "Now take that card out of the seat pocket, and I want you to look at this diagram." You know, I've flown

¹ Swindoll, Growing Wise in Family Life.

millions of miles over the world and here I thought I had the card memorized, but I panicked because I couldn't find the crazy card.

Everybody looked stunned as we felt the plane plunge down. Finally, the steward said, "Now tighten the seat belts as tight as you can, and pull up your legs and bury your head in your lap." We couldn't look out to see where we were--high or low. I peeked around--the Portuguese were crossing themselves, and I thought, "This is it. This is serious. I can't believe this. I didn't know this was going to happen tonight. I guess this is it." And I had a crazy sensation. Then the steward's voice broke into my consciousness, barking out in this machine-gun fashion, "Prepare for impact."

Frankly, I wasn't thinking about the photocopier. I wasn't worried about the oil in my car. At times like that, involuntarily, from deep inside of us, something comes out that's never structured, planned or rehearsed. And all I could do was pray. Everybody started to pray. I found myself praying in a way I never thought of doing. As I buried my head in my lap and pulled my knees up, and I was convinced it was over I said, "Oh, God, thank you. Thank you for the incredible privilege of knowing you. Life has been wonderful." And as the plane was going down my last thought, my last cry, "Oh, God, my wife! My children!"

Now, I should say for the sake of you the reader that I survived! As I wandered about in the middle of the night in the airport with a knot in my stomach and cotton in my mouth, I couldn't speak. I ached all over. I thought, "What did I do? What did I say? What were my last thoughts? Why did I think that?" I wondered, "What was the bottom line?"

Here's the bottom line: relationship. When I....saw my wife t the airport, I looked at her and rushed to hold her hand. I just looked at her a moment then threw my arms around her and said, "Oh, I appreciate you." And then with tears in my eyes, I looked at her again, and said, "I appreciate you so much. I didn't know if I'd ever see you again; oh, I appreciate you."

When I arrived home, I found my three sons and said, "I appreciate you. Boy, I'm glad you're in this house and I'm a part of you." I am only one, you are only one. But because we are in a family we hold a piece of the puzzle in our own power. And what we can do, we should do. I trust that you will say with me, "And, by the grace of God, I will do what I can do in my home." If you are getting caught in the squirrel

cage of a hurry-up lifestyle, let me urge you to slow it down and get off. Your family desires more than the leftovers of your time. By the grace of God do what you can do. Start today. PLEASE.

Immediately that should grab all our hearts about our beloved family members. But long term, it should also touch us as we think about our new family, our wider family in Christ. That is what Paul heads to as he winds up this letter to his friends and family members in Thessalonica. He has repeated the theme of expecting Christ's coming each moment of life. He adds this final thought, "Living in God's Family" is a powerful privilege. While we wait for Jesus it is our responsibility to care for that family in Christ. Note these special areas he outlines in this section:

1. While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR LEADERS: (12-13) Our family obligations to our LEADERSHIP
2. While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR FAMILY: (14-15) Our family obligations to our PARTNERS IN CHRIST
3. While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR LORD: (16-18) Our family obligation to our INNER LIEFE
4. While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING TO WORSHIP: (19-22) Our family obligation to our SHARED WORSHIP

Paul's favorite name for Christians Brethren 60 x N.T. 27 x I/II Thess.
What is a Christian?

➤ I Pet. 1:22-25 = Born again word > H.S.

➤ II Pet. 1:3-4 = Partaking God's nature

Then part of brand new family of God! So to a brand new family in Greece Paul writes back to help them function as a family!

While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR LEADERS: (12-13)
Our family obligations to our LEADERSHIP

Acts 20:17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. NKJV

Ephesians 4:7-16 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.⁸ Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."⁹ (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,¹² for the

equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. NKJV

1 Peter 5: 1-5 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." NKJV

FIRST Paul speaks to our leaders in the family. One of the foundations for having a family of any kind is to have leadership. When the leadership goes, the family breaks down. In New Testament there was always a plurality of leaders. These are godly men who are referred to interchangeably by the terms Elders, Overseers and Pastors. Just as in the Biblical home the father is the leaders, the mother stands with him in loving submission and the children honor and obey them, so Paul describes the church. Any disturbance of this order is to ask for serious trouble.

God has ordained leadership for the local church. It is true that we are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28); but it is also true that the Head of the church has given gifts to people, and then given these people to the churches to exercise His will (Eph. 4:7–16). Just as the flock needs a shepherd (1 Peter 5:1–5), so the family needs a leader. According to Martin L. Gross in his book, *The Psychological Society*, more than 60,000 guidance workers and 7,000 school psychologists work in our American public education system; and many of them function as substitute parents. Many students need counseling, but no

professional worker can take the place of a loving, faithful father or mother.

When Warren Wiersbe's oldest son entered high school, he met his assigned counselor. "Now, if you have any problems, feel free to come to me," the counselor said. Our son replied, "If I have any problems, I'll talk to my father!" He was not being disrespectful or unappreciative of the counselor, but he was giving expression of a basic principle: children need the leadership and guidance that only parents can give.

What responsibilities do we have toward our spiritual leaders?

1. ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR PLACE. 1 Thessalonians 5:12a *And we urge you, brethren.* If there are children in the family there must be parental leadership. Elders are God's gifts to the church. They have spiritual authority from the Lord and we should accept them in the Lord. They are not dictators, but leaders and examples. As they follow the Lord, we must follow them.
2. APPRECIATE THEIR MINISTRY. That is the meaning of the exhortation "know them who labor among you" (1 Thes. 5:12b). There is nothing wrong with honoring faithful servants of God, so long as God gets the glory. Spiritual leadership is a great responsibility and a difficult task. It is not easy to serve as a pastor, elder, deacon, or other spiritual leader. The battles and burdens are many, and sometimes the encouragements are few. It is dangerous when a church family takes their leaders for granted and fails to pray for them, work with them, and encourage them.
3. LOVE THEM. v. 12c *among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.* As brothers, the leaders are "among us"; and as leaders, they are "over us in the Lord." This could be a very strained relationship apart from true Christian love. For a pastor to be "among" and "over" at the same time demands grace and the power of the Spirit. If he gets out of balance, his ministry will be weakened and possibly destroyed. Some church members want their pastor to be a buddy, but this weakens his authority. On the other hand, if he emphasizes *only* his authority, he could become a selfish dictator.
4. OBEY THEM. v. 13b *Be at peace among yourselves.* How? Note Hebrews 13:17 "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves" (Heb. 13:17). When God's servant, led by God's Spirit, calls us to obey God's Word, then we must obey. This does not mean that every spiritual leader is always right in everything. Abraham, Moses, David, and even Peter made mistakes in their words and deeds. As a pastor I am painfully aware I am made of

clay. Being wrong is part of daily life. Being false (to know you are wrong and not admit it) is never to be in our lives.

While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR FAMILY: (14-15)
Our family obligations to our PARTNERS IN CHRIST

Every family members must learn to minister to each other.
The older members teach the younger members
Titus 2: 3-5 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. NKJV

According to Ephesians 4: 12, the spiritual leaders in the church are supposed to equip the members to do the work of the ministry. In most churches, the members pay the leaders to do the work of the ministry; and the leaders cannot do it all. Consequently, the work begins to weaken and die, and everybody blames the preacher. Paul named some special family members who need personal help.

1. v.14a "Unruly" 'out of rank' need ADMONISHING = corrective instruction. That's hard to give and hard to take but a spiritual, love-filled Christian can do both. 2 Tim. 2: 3-4. Same v. 12 Job of ALL *The unruly (v. 14a)*. This word means "careless, out of line." It was applied to a soldier who would not keep rank but insisted on marching his own way. 2 Thessalonians 3: 6, 11 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. NKJV
2. v.14b "Timid" need COMFORT Para [near] muthisthe [speech] Tender words up close Encouraging words. *The feebleminded (v. 14b)*. This term has nothing to do with mentality. The literal translation of the Greek word is "little-souled, fainthearted." These are the quitters in the church family. They always look on the dark side of things and give up when the going is tough. In families where there are three or more children, usually one of them is a quitter. Every church family has its share of quitters too. These people need to be encouraged, which is the meaning of the word translated "comfort" in the *King James Version*. It is also found in 1 Thessalonians 2: 11. We must teach the "little-souled" that the trials

of life will help to enlarge them and make them stronger in the faith.

3. v. 14c "Weak" need to be helped. "Hold fast to the weak!" is the literal translation. "Don't let them fall!" Who were they?
 - 1 Thessalonians 3: 3-5 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.⁴ For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.⁵ For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. NKJV Thus they are the Persecuted and shrinking; That² encouraging was dramatically demonstrated in the arena of Carthage in AD 202. Perpetua, a young woman from a noble family and Felicitas, a slave-girl, faced martyrdom for Christ. As they faced the wild beasts, they joined hands. Slave and free woman died together for the love of the same Lord There is no place for man-made barriers in the church since Christ is all, and in all. Because Christ indwells all believers, all are equal. He breaks down all racial, religious, cultural, and social barriers, and makes believers into one new man (Eph. 2: 15).
 - 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-8 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;⁴ that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,⁵ not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;⁶ that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.⁷ For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.⁸ Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. NKJV They are also those yielding to sin, as Jude says pull them out of the fire but watch yourselves Jude²²⁻²³

This kind of personal ministry is not easy, and so Paul added some wise counsel to encourage us.

1. v. 14D "PATIENT TO ALL": Slow to anger, even-tempered; Spiritual response. *Be patient (v. 14d)*. It takes patience to raise a family. That weaker member who demands much help may one day be a choice leader, so never give up. A pastor friend and I were chatting after I had spoken at a service in his church, when a red-headed boy about ten years old came running past us, heading up

2 M. A. Smith, From Christ to Constantine [Downers Grove, III: Intervarsity, 1973], p. 107.

the center aisle. "Have you ever noticed," remarked my friend, "that the biggest scamps in the Sunday School usually turn out to be pastors or missionaries?" Patience!

2. v. 15A DON'T RETALIATE [explode or clam up] against offenders. That's hard, but it's a sure sign of spiritual maturity Rom. 12:17-21; I Peter 2:19-23, 3:9. Non-retaliation for personal wrongs is perhaps best evidence of personal Christian maturity. *Watch your motives (v. 15)*. Often as we minister to others, they reject us and even oppose us. Often they show no appreciation. But we should always serve in love, and be ready to forgive. "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17–21, NASB). If your motive is a desire for appreciation and praise, you may be disappointed. If your motive is "ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5), you will never be disappointed. v. 15b Pursue kindness for all How? It's the fruit of the H.S. in our lives. I Thes. 5:13 = Love; 5:16 = Joy; 5:13 = Peace; 5:14 = Long suffering
3. v. 16 BE JOYFUL Joy takes the burden out of service. "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). God loves a cheerful servant as well as a cheerful giver. Every church family has its Doubting Thomas or its Gloomy Gus. To see them and listen to them is like witnessing an autopsy, or diving into a cold lake on a winter's day. God wants His family to be happy, and that means that each member must contribute to the joy. The four spiritual characteristics Paul mentioned are part of the fruit of the Spirit named in Galatians 5:22—love (1 Thes. 5:13), joy (1 Thes. 5:16), peace (1 Thes. 5:13), and long-suffering (1 Thes. 5:14). We cannot manufacture these spiritual qualities; they only come as we yield to the Spirit and permit Him to control us.

This is a big task but we have been called to do it in the power of the Holy Spirit. For that reason Paul was never ashamed to ask Christians to pray for him. In at least seven of his letters, he mentioned his great need for prayer support.

1. Romans 15:30-32 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,³¹ that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for

Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,³² that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.

2. 2 Corinthians 1:11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many. The greatest help we can give to God's servants is "helping together by prayer." The word *sunhuperon* translated "helping together" is used only here in the Greek New Testament and is composed of three words: with, under, work. It is a picture of laborers under the burden, working together to get the job accomplished. It is encouraging to know that the Holy Spirit also assists us in our praying and helps to carry the load (Rom. 8:26).
3. Ephesians 6:18-20 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.
4. Philippians 1:19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,
5. Colossians 4:3 meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,
6. 1 Thessalonians 5:25 Brethren, pray for us.
7. 2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you,
8. Philemon 22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

Family partnership is vital to the health and growth of the church. Are you bearing your share of the burdens, or are you merely a spectator who watches the others do the job?

Next time

➤ While waiting for Jesus we should be **LOVING OUR LORD**: (16-18)

Our family obligation to our **INNER LIFE**

While waiting for Jesus we should be **LOVING TO WORSHIP**: (19-22)

Our family obligation to our **SHARED WORSHIP**