

MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Letters to Friends – 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Overview: In times of a COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing, relationships can easily be affected. The Apostle Paul also had to deal with the physical distance between himself and the churches to whom he ministered. This significant “social/physical distancing” did not stop Paul from communicating the Gospel message and encouraging Christ’s followers. Join us this year as we study the Letters of Paul.

Video: BibleProject New Testament Letters: Literary Context
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUXJ8Owes8E>

Segment Questions:

- When you think of letter writing, who do you think of and why?
- What are some meaningful letters that you have written or received?
- When was the last time you received a letter or card with a personal message? How did it make you feel?
- How does understanding the “literary style” (*as presented by BibleProject*) prepare you to get more from our study of Paul’s letters?
- Which is your favorite letter of Paul? Why?
- If you had a chance to sit down with Paul, what would you like to ask him?
- In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Paul expresses, “So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.” How does letter writing help you share your own self? Why is that important?

Action Questions:

- Write and send a letter this week to encourage or reconnect with someone on your heart.
- Besides letter writing, what are other ways you can share your own self with others? Be intentional this week in putting one of these ideas into action.

Personal Prayer: Father God, We thank you for your love and grace. Lord, be with us as we study your words through Paul. Unify us. Stir within us a desire to run the race as to win the prize. Help us to sharpen and encourage each other in grace and love. We love you and praise you, Lord! Amen

Letter

To my brothers of Men's Life of Bloomington, both past and present,

Greetings! Grace and peace to you, brothers, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! I have been saddened by our inability to meet together in person and am excited to see your faces (*even if on a Zoom meeting*). I thank my God every time that I remember you in this absence from one another. I know that it is in our meeting and talking together that God has blessed us and spurs us on into deeper faith as we earnestly seek Him together. Being so fond of each other, we are always ready to share, not only the gospel of God with each other, but also our own selves. I pray that God has used this time of separation and isolation to reveal truths about Himself and the status of your own heart to you. I pray that our Creator is continuing to work in each of us as He molds and shapes us into the image of His son, Christ Jesus.

Seeing that we bear the image of our Creator, and our God is a relational God, He has made us to be in relationship with one another. That, my brothers, has been a challenge in this time of COVID-19 and social distancing, in masks and mandates. I take joy in seeing you again and I am excited in the continuing of our faith journeys together. Letters are a personal way to communicate thoughts and ideas when you are separated from someone by distance. Therefore, we come together again in the spirit of our early church brethren to read and study the letters of the Apostle Paul this year in Men's Life. I am encouraged when I look back at the accounts of Paul and see him always paired up with someone (e.g., Silas, Barnabas, Titus, Timothy). Paul fostered relationships as he ministered, and his love of people is so evident in his letters to the early church. As an author, Paul wrote 13 books of the New Testament and our goal this year is to explore the letters together. Our brother, Sean Chambers, and I have been starting to read through the letters of the Apostle Paul in the chronological order they were likely written. We have set a pace to complete all 13 over the course of a single month, only to cycle through them again the next month. One of the blessings has been to read the letter in its entirety in a day or two (at least the shorter ones). Seeing the letter in its wholeness lends to better understanding of Paul's message.

Paul discusses some **deep theological topics** with the churches, such as God's righteousness, justification, sanctification, the kingship of Jesus, and reconciliation to God. Not only are these important and sometimes difficult to flesh out all the details, but they are essential for the second part of Paul's letters: **application to daily life**. Paul proceeds to discuss these theological topics in the light of how as new creations in Christ, we are supposed to unify, marry, work, form friendships, be a part of church bodies, and stay away from false teachings. Of course, neither of these lists are complete.

We are commissioning each of the leaders to take one of Paul's letters and to expand on it and help you understand how it applies to our lives, so I look forward to hearing what Sean Chambers, Dave Ebeling, DG Elmore, Jon Holden, Josh Holden, Dave Hudson, JC Hulls, Jeff Jones, Paul Konstanski, Jeff Mahrt, John Rabold, Ron Remak, Denny Smith, Rick Thatcher and Luke Uhl have to say this year. We pray that you continue to grow in love of and knowledge in our God this year. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

Peace of Christ,
Aaron Brown