



christ church  
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# A Living and Attractive Church

CHRIST CHURCH  
HOME-GROUPS  
Summer 2019

## HOME GROUP PROGRAMME:

- |                               |                                      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| w/b Mon 6 <sup>th</sup> May   | 1. A Church to copy                  |
| w/b Mon 13 <sup>rd</sup> May  | 2. A Church that pleases God         |
| w/b Mon 20 <sup>th</sup> May  | 3. Passionate in Prayer              |
| w/b Mon 27 <sup>th</sup> May  | – Free week                          |
| Wed 5 <sup>th</sup> June      | Prayer Meeting at 11.00 am & 7.45 pm |
| w/b Mon 10 <sup>th</sup> June | 4. Living to please God              |
| w/b Mon 17 <sup>th</sup> June | 5. Encourage one another             |
| w/b Mon 24 <sup>th</sup> June | 6. Brothers and sisters              |
| Wed 3 <sup>rd</sup> July      | Prayer Meeting at 11.00 am & 7.45 pm |

## A LIVING AND ATTRACTIVE CHURCH

What does a church which is Making Disciples, Growing Disciples and Being Disciples look like? To help give us some answers, we are going to look together at 1 Thessalonians.

The Apostle Paul's second missionary journey brought the gospel to Europe for the first time (at least, the first time recorded in Acts). Travelling with Silas, Paul arrived in Philippi, but was soon in trouble and ended up in prison. An earthquake during the night led to them being released and escorted from the city – and from there they went on to Thessalonica. As usual, Paul went to the synagogue and began preaching about Jesus – *explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah' he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.* (Acts 17:3-4)

But as happened so often, this positive response to the gospel from some was matched by hostility from others, and very soon Paul and Silas had to leave. Paul's ministry there lasted just a month – how could the new church that he had planted there manage without him?

Despite the short time he had with them, Paul was deeply committed to the church in Thessalonica. Not long after having to leave, he sent Timothy to find out what was happening there. When Timothy came back and reported that the church was still strong and growing, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to encourage them.

We, of course, live in a very different situation. Paul wrote to a church just a few months old – Christ Church has been here for over 150 years. Paul wrote to people who had only become Christians a short time earlier – many of us have been Christians for years.

But the issues which Paul wrote about are just as important for us as they were for the Thessalonians. As we think about what it means for us to be members of Christ Church, playing our part in Making, Growing and Being Disciples, this letter can give us some important pointers.

# 1. A Church to Copy

## WELCOME

What person, either from today or from the past, would you most like to be?

## WORSHIP

Of course, the person that we most want to be like is Jesus. Take some time to praise him for what the Bible tells you about him.

## WORD

There is a lot of talk nowadays about ‘role models.’ We live in a celebrity culture, and very often young people will look at the things celebrities do, and want to imitate them. There can be real dangers in this – especially when the ‘role models’ act in very inappropriate ways – for example commentators have said that when stars seem to be able to get away with taking drugs, it can lead others to copy them.

In the same way, there have been reports which blame the breakdown in discipline in youth football leagues on the behaviour of professional footballers – if they can treat referees with contempt, their young fans will inevitably do the same.

Of course, it is not all bad news. There are many good role models in society, and stories of the way in which, for example, a good school

teacher or youth leader can inspire children to achieve. But whether the influence is for good or bad, it seems clear that children do copy what they see others doing.

And not just children. How many adults subconsciously imitate the characters they see on films or in soaps? We all tend to imitate what we admire; sadly at times we admire the wrong things, and get led astray!

Things were the same in New Testament times. The apostle Paul was always concerned that people should follow good role-models – ultimately the Lord Jesus. But Paul could also tell people to imitate him (1 Corinthians 4:16) while the writer to the Hebrews says *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith* (Hebrews 13:7) – one of the most challenging verses in the Bible for anyone who is a leader!

As individuals we need good role models, and the same is true for us as a church. And that is just what we find in the church in Thessalonica.

## Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

*‘We always thank God for all of you ...’* (verse 2)

- How often do you thank God for Christ Church?
- What things about Christ Church most lead you to thanks?

Paul could thank God for all of the members of the church in Thessalonica. But – like any church – there must have been some people there who it was harder to like than others!

- Whilst we might find it easy to thank God for those who are closest to us within Christ Church, how can we cultivate an attitude where we thank God for everyone who is part of the church?

*We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (verse 3)*

Faith, hope and love are three hallmarks of Christian faith. Paul mentions them again in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, and in 1 Corinthians 13:13. He also links the three together in Ephesians 4:2-5, Colossians 1:4-5, Galatians 5:5-6, Romans 5:1-5.

- Why do you think these three things are so central to the Christian faith? (It might help to look up the passages listed above.)

Here Paul says that the mark of authentic faith, hope and love are that they lead to action.

- Why is it important that work in the church flows from faith, rather than from any other motive?

The word Paul uses for 'labour' literally means 'tiring, or even exhausting work' As one commentator puts it: *The word expresses the cost of their love, not its result. With or without visible success, love gives itself unstintingly.*

- Have there been situations where you have seen love produce that kind of labour?

Finally, these young Christians had 'endurance.' There were many things which could have tempted them to give up following Jesus. In this letter we read about them facing opposition and persecution. In verse 6 here we read about them facing suffering, which may well refer to material poverty. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, Paul writes about the churches in Macedonia (which included the church in Thessalonica) suffering *extreme poverty*.

But they didn't give up – because of the hope that they had.

- What did Paul mean by *hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*?
- Why would that hope help them to persevere?

*Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power. (verse 5)*

- How did Paul know that the gospel had come to them 'with power'?

The gospel produced *deep conviction* but also *joy* (v.6)

- What is the relationship between those two things?
- Have there been times in your life when as you have read the Bible, the Holy Spirit has convicted you?
- Did this lead to joy for you?

*They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (verse 10)*

Of course, things are different for us – we never were idol worshippers.

Except, of course, that our society is full of false God's which people worship – money, sex, leisure, their gardens. But because these things are ordinary elements of everyday life, it can be much more difficult to realise when they have become *idols*.

Would Paul be able to write the same thing about us? Are there things which you once used to worship, which now you have turned your back on because you are a Christian? Or are there things which still have too important a place in your life; which might even verge on idolatry?

*And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. (verse 7)*

When Paul looked at the church in Thessalonica, he saw a church which was rooted in faith, hope and love. A church where the gospel was convicting people, and producing changed lives. A church where despite the problems they faced, they were passionate about the gospel, and about others coming to know Jesus.

And that is a model, not just for other churches in that area 1950 years ago – it is a good model for us.

I guess that at this point, we could ask, 'and how does Christ Church shape up to that model?' But instead, let's ask the question about ourselves as individuals – the people that make up Christ Church.

- Do you have the sort of faith, hope and love which the Thessalonians had? What could you do to strengthen these things in your life (and thus in Christ Church)?

- Has the gospel transformed your life?
- Are you a model for others to imitate, or are there things about your life which you would want to keep hidden from others?

### WORK

What could you as a group do over the coming few weeks that would make Christ Church more like the church in Thessalonica?

## 2. A church that pleases God

### WELCOME

What present would you most like to be given?

### WORSHIP

Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.'

Thank the Lord for loving you so much, and ask his forgiveness for the times when you have failed to love him. Ask him to help you love him more.

### WORD

I think that inside most of us is a desire to be liked by others – I know that a lot of what I most naturally do is motivated by that desire. Maybe there are some people who seem to like to upset others, but most of us only upset other people reluctantly.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be liked, and it is good to aim to do things that will please others. But life is rarely simple, and on occasions we are faced with situations where in order to please one person, we might have to upset someone else. Who we try to please then says a lot about how important those different people are to us.

That is true in human relationships, and is true in our relationship with God. I'm sure that in principle we all want to please the Lord – the challenge comes when pleasing him means doing something we

don't want to do, or doing something that might not be popular with others.

### Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

*We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.*  
(verse 4)

Of course pleasing God doesn't always mean upsetting people! Within the church I would hope that it is everyone's desire to please the Lord, though at times there might be differences of opinion about what we should do to please him. And anyway, when there are differences in the church, we know that one thing that definitely does please the Lord is unity in the gospel.

But when it comes to the society we live in, it can be different. The world has a different agenda to the church, which means that at times it is looking to the church to do things which might not be what God wants.

- Can you think of any situations where in order to please society we would have to neglect pleasing the Lord,
- or conversely, situations where if we are determined to please the Lord, it could bring us into conflict with society?

*And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.* (verse 13)

As a church we need to be committed to doing what pleases the Lord. And we find out what pleases him as we study his word, and trust it as his word.

- How is God's word at work among us?
- What sort of things does the Bible tell us will please the Lord?
- How important are these things to you?

*Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well. (verse 8)*

Paul was no 'hit and run' evangelist, even though he had been forced to leave Thessalonica so early. He had a real passion for these young Christians.

I guess that in our context we might rewrite this to say 'We loved the people at Christ Church so much that we delighted to share with you not only our Sunday mornings and the odd hour in the week, but our lives as well.'

- What things in our society make it difficult for us to share that depth of relationship with others in the church?
- How can we have that sort of love for people we find it difficult to get on with?

*We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. (verse 9)*

In Paul's time travelling teachers would expect to be provided for quite comfortably by the people they visited, but Paul was determined not to be like that. Our circumstances are different, but the principle that the gospel should not be a means of making money still stands.

Of course that means that we have to take seriously our own funding of our mission – something we will be thinking about on Sunday mornings in July.

#### Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Paul here is writing about the Christians in Macedonia (which included Thessalonica) They were suffering considerable poverty themselves – but that didn't stop them from taking their giving seriously.

- How did they understand their giving? (verse 4-5)
- How does verse 7 show how seriously Paul took giving?
- In what ways might excelling in faith, speech and knowledge seem more attractive than excelling in giving?
- What motive does Paul give for giving (verse 8-9)?

Back to 1 Thessalonians!

*For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: you suffered from your own people the same thing those churches suffered from the Jews. (verse 14)*

Standing out against society can lead to persecution.

- Have you any experience of suffering for the gospel?
- How does the example of the Lord Jesus help us to cope with persecution?

#### **WORK**

Do you know anyone, either in this country or abroad, who is suffering because of their faith in Jesus? Is there something you could do to help and encourage them?

### 3. Passionate in Prayer

#### WELCOME

What do you get most enthusiastic about?

#### WORSHIP

Psalm 116 begins *I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.*

Praise God for the times he has answered your prayers.

#### WORD

Paul was a tireless missionary evangelist, who travelled the known world to preach the gospel. A quick read through the book of Acts might make it look as though Paul was an out and out activist – but that is only part of the story. Paul was also a man of prayer – deep, persistent, committed prayer.

All of Paul's letters give us hints about his prayer life. He was never content to just plant a new church – even after he had moved on, he continued to pray for the church. That was true of the church he planted in Thessalonica – as this letter shows. Here are some of his references to praying for this church:

*We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.*  
(1:2)

*Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again ...*  
(3:10)

*May the Lord Jesus make your love increase ...* (3:12)

*May he strengthen your hearts ...*(3:13)

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.* (5:23)

Paul loved these young Christians, and because he loved them, he prayed for them. Paul wrote to tell them how to live as Christians, and he also prayed that God would be at work enabling them to do it.

But Paul didn't just pray for them – he encouraged them to pray as well. In fact, his desire was that they should *pray continually* (5:17) And it seems reasonable to assume that if the Christians in Thessalonica were imitating Paul (1:6), then they too would be devoted to prayer – for one another, for Paul, and for other churches.

#### Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17 – 3:13

*Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.* (3:10)

Paul knew that though his readers had become Christians, they still had a lot of growing to do as disciples. He wanted to visit them, not just because he enjoyed their company, but because he knew that he had been called to help them in that growth.

- How important is it to you to see others grow as Christians?

What practical things could you do to help the younger Christians at Christ Church?

- Our prayers for others most naturally focus on their problems. Of course, it is good to pray about those things,

but how much time do you spend praying for Christian growth in others at Christ Church?

- What might help you pray more like Paul?
- What specific things does Paul pray for in 3:11-13?
- Why are each of these important?

### Read Colossians 1:3-14

- What does Paul thank God for?
- Where do you see these things in Christ Church?
- What does Paul pray for?
- Why do you think each of these is important?

Prayer was so important for Paul because he knew that the Christians in Thessalonica would face attack, not just from the society around them but, more significantly, from the devil.

*I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and our labours might have been in vain. (verse 5)*

Paul was clear that the church is in a spiritual battle, and that we do face temptations as a church, not just as individuals. His key passage on this is Ephesians 6:10-18, which although often applied to individual Christians was originally written to a church.

- How can we guard ourselves against things which could make our work as a church 'in vain'?

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encourage about you because of your faith. (verse 7)*

- What encourages you at Christ Church?
- How often do you thank God for it?
- What can you do to be a source of encouragement for others?

### WORK

It seems to me that one of the key things that Paul would flag up for any church is praying for one another, not just in terms of supporting one another through problems, but regular prayer for spiritual growth. This is something that all of us should be doing.

It is important that you should be praying for other members of Christ Church, and especially for the other members of your group. Some people feel uncomfortable praying for others out loud – but it is very encouraging to hear others pray for you! So do that now.

## 4. Love each other

### WELCOME

What is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for you?

### WORSHIP

Psalm 1 reminds us of the blessing that comes from hearing God's word and putting it into practice. Use the psalm, then thank God for showing us his ways, and ask him to help you to trust and obey his word.

### WORD

I think that for most people the word 'holy' would conjure up thoughts of something a bit other world – something to do with old church buildings and stained glass windows. It is just to do with some religious part of life. For others it might make them think of people who are 'holier than thou' – always criticising others.

Neither of those really has anything to do with the way the Bible uses the word. 'Holy' just means 'set apart' – all Christians are holy because God has set us apart for himself; he wants us to live a different life from the society around us not for the sake of being different but because we love him and want to please him. God makes us holy, our response is to live out that new life, that holiness.

Last time we saw that Paul prayed that God would enable the Christians in Thessalonica to live in a way that pleases him – holy and blameless. But Paul didn't just pray that – he went on to tell

them what they need to do in order to play their part in fulfilling this prayer – how they could live lives which pleased the Lord.

### Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

*As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. (4:1)*

- How important to you is it to live in a way which pleases God? (Obviously if you stop and think about it, you are bound to say 'very important'! But in practice rather than theory, how important is it?)
- How often do you think of your work life, or your hobbies, or your relationships, in that way?

*It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality. (4:3)*

- Why is sexual immorality such a problem for a church?

It is common today to hear people ask 'what can be wrong with it if no-one is hurt by it.' 4:4-6 is not entirely clear, but it does seem that Paul is saying that when you indulge in sexual immorality you are actually taking advantage of someone else, and wronging (or hurting) them.

- In what ways does sexual immorality hurt people?
- What should the leaders in a church do if they find that someone in the church is involved in sexual immorality?

- How can we, as a church, help one another to stay away from sexual immorality? (If you come up with any practical answers, don't just file them away, either act on them yourselves, or pass them on to the leadership.)

Paul turns from sexual immorality (false love) to real love. *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 God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more. (4:11-12)*

We know that love is important in the church. But even though Paul praises the love in this church – there is always room for growth.

- In what ways can you see love being demonstrated within Christ Church?
- Are there areas where you think Paul would urge us to grow in love?

Paul urges these Christians to make sure that *your daily life may win the respect of outsiders. (4:12)*

- What sort of things would win the respect of those outside the church today – and might therefore draw them to the Lord Jesus?

## WORK

Are there areas of your life where you know you struggle to live in a way which please the Lord? It might be at work, or in some leisure activity, it could be at home – what you watch on TV or listen to. How can you help one another to grow in your discipleship in those areas?

## 5. Encourage one another

### WELCOME

You have been made Prime Minister for the day! What new laws would you want to push through parliament?

### WORSHIP

Psalms 62 & 63 are great hymns of dependence on God. Use them to lead you into praising God for the times he has helped and encouraged you.

### WORD

Bereavement is one of the hardest experiences anyone has to face. Even for Christians, there is a deep sense of loss, and it often gives rise to questions – what happens to those who die? Will we ever see them again? And what about us – what will happen to us when we die?

It seems that for the Christians in Thessalonica, there was a particular urgency to these questions. They knew that Jesus had died, risen, ascended, and that he was coming again to bring in the new heaven and new earth where his people would live forever. But – what about those who died before Jesus came back? What would happen to them?

And what would happen when they stood in front of Jesus – the one whom God had appointed as Judge of all.

## Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

*Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. (4:13)*

- Is it right for Christians to mourn the loss of a loved one?
- What would you say to a Christian who said, 'I know that they are with the Lord, so it would be wrong of me to cry'?
- Paul talks about us having 'hope.' What is this hope (v.14-17)?
- In what ways is this different from the 'hope' that most people in our society have?

Paul's main point here is that when Jesus comes again, it will be good news for those Christians who have already died, as well as for those who are still alive. All will have their place in the recreated universe. And the Thessalonians would have understood better than us that talk of being caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord didn't mean that the clouds are our final destination. Tom Wright puts it like this: 'their meeting with the Lord doesn't mean that they will be staying in mid-air with him. They are like Roman citizens in a colony, going out to meet the emperor when he pays them a state visit, and then accompanying him back to the city itself.'

The key point is that, whether or not we die before Jesus comes, our destiny is to be with him forever.

*Therefore encourage one another with these words. (4:18)*

When Paul talks about the return of Jesus, he does so not just to inform us, nor to confuse us, but to encourage us. And he expects Christians to be using these things to encourage each other.

- Do you find the prospect of Jesus' return encouraging?
- How does it influence the way you live your life now?

*Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you. (5:1)*

We cannot know when Jesus will come back – Jesus himself said that not even he knew the time of his coming. But at least, we do know that he is coming. For other people, the return of the Lord Jesus will be utterly unexpected – as unexpected as a thief turning up in the night.

If you have no reason to expect a visit from a thief – you don't take any precautions. If you know that a thief is coming, even if you don't know when, how stupid it would be not to take precautions!

*But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. (5:4)*

- So – if we know Jesus is coming back, how should that influence us? What sort of things should we be doing?

Tom Wright again: 'Christians are daytime people, even though the rest of the world is still in the night .... Here you are in the middle of the world's night – but the Spirit of Jesus within you is telling you it's already daytime.'

- What things do people do in our society because they are in the dark about Jesus and his return?
- What specifically does Paul say we as Christians should be doing? (v.8) How does this relate to 1 Thessalonians 1:3?

When Jesus returns, 'he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.' Whilst this will be the ultimate disaster for those who don't know him, why do we not need to worry about the judgement?

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (5:11)*

- If we know that Jesus is coming, how can we encourage one another to be ready?

Encouragement is a big theme in this letter – and in the New Testament generally. But it is never the bland being nice that can characterise encouragement in our society.

### Read 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

- Why was it important for Paul to be able to say that he, Silas and Timothy had lived 'holy, righteous and blameless' lives when they were in Thessalonica?
- How can our individual lifestyles act as an encouragement for others within Christ Church?

- How might the way we live become a source of discouragement for others?

### WORK

Hebrews 10:25 tells us that we should be: *not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.* One of the hallmarks of our services is that they should be times of encouragement. But that isn't just the responsibility of the leaders and preachers – we should all be encouraging one another. What could you do over the next few Sundays to encourage others at our services?

## 6. Brothers and Sisters

### WELCOME

If all animals were tameable, what animal would you most like to have as a pet?

### WORSHIP

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:3)*

Praise God for the way he has cared for you – especially when you have gone through difficult times.

### WORD

One New Testament picture of the church is that it is the family of God, whose members recognise and treat each other as brothers and sisters. This seems to have been a thought in Paul's mind as he wrote this letter – he uses the term 'brothers and sisters' 17 times in just 5 chapters.

We are the family of God, because he is our Father. And so at Christ Church, all who have accepted Christ as Lord, and thus become part of God's family, are brothers and sisters.

It is a lovely image – especially for people who might have very little in the way of human family. In Christ, and as part of Christ Church, we all have many brothers and sisters. But, as any parent will know, just being brothers and sisters doesn't necessarily mean that

children get on well together! Sometimes action needs to be taken to make sure brothers and sisters treat each other as they should.

### Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

*Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. (5:12)*

- When Paul speaks of 'those who work hard among you' he is referring to leaders in the church. But if we are family, why should we need leaders? Is the idea of leadership within the church at odds with the idea of family?
- What role of leaders does Paul highlight?
- What do you think that means in practice?
- In our consumerist society, where if someone doesn't like something in church they can just go and join another one, is it possible to have any sort of church discipline?
- How does Paul want us to treat each other as brothers and sisters within Christ Church (5:13b – 15)?
- Which do you find most challenging?

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (5:16-18)*

These 3 verses are so short – and yet so difficult to put into practice!

- How can Paul say that we should always rejoice when there is so much in life that can hurt and upset us?

John Stott writes: 'joy and happiness are not at our command, and cannot be turned on and off like a tap. ... Paul is issuing not an order to be happy but an invitation to worship, and to joyful worship at that.' And Tom Wright adds: 'The early Christians knew a lot about suffering: Paul wanted them to learn how to celebrate in the midst of it.'

- What can we do to make our worship joyful, whilst at the same time taking the sufferings that we go through seriously?
- How is this linked to giving thanks in all circumstances?
- And what about 'pray continuously'? Does Paul want Christians to give up all other activity and work, and to never sleep?
- What sort of things did Paul pray about? (Think of his prayers in this letter, and in his other letters.)
- Clement of Alexandria defined prayer as 'keeping company with God.' Does this help us to understand what Paul might have meant here?

John Stott again: 'I sometimes wonder if the comparatively slow progress towards world peace, world equity and world evangelisation is not due, more than anything else, to the prayerlessness of the people of God.'

- What can we do to encourage one another in Christ Church to take our responsibility to pray more seriously?

*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. (5:19-22)*

Prophecy was important in the early church, though it is difficult to be sure exactly what the word meant in the New Testament. But the New Testament letters do encourage us to expect that God can still speak to his people in some way. It might be that someone believes that God has something to say through them to the church; it might be an inspired thought or idea, it could be something which one person says, which another person recognises as God speaking.

- How should we test these things?
- How will testing them help us on the one hand not to quench the Spirit, and on the other hand to avoid evil?
- Paul has compressed so many ideas in these few verses. But why are all of them important if we are to function properly as God's family?

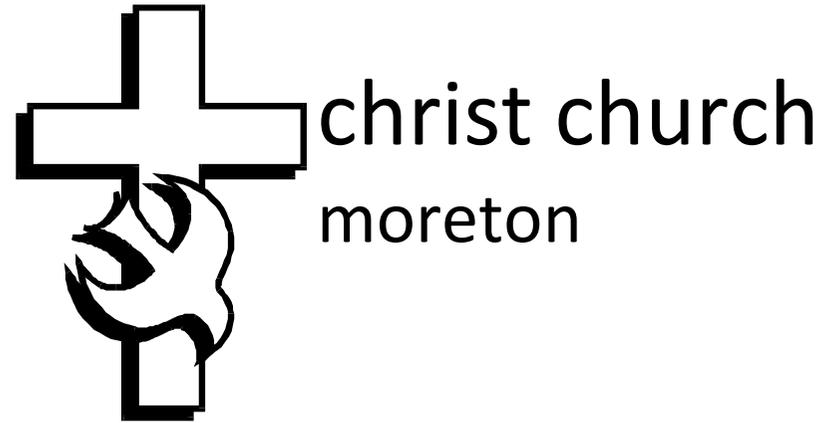
#### WORK

And as we have looked at 1 Thessalonians we have seen some key themes: our services on Sundays should be joyful celebrations where we can all encourage one another; we should all be giving realistically, each sharing in the financial burdens of the church; we should be praying for one another and with one another, and we should be serving one another (labour prompted by love).

If you are a member of Christ Church, these are not things that you can leave to others – they are part of the responsibility of membership.

Which do you find most challenging? How can you help one another to do these things more and more?

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)*



making disciples  
growing disciples  
being disciples