

# EMBEDDED

There is no greater force for change or cultural influence than the local church. The church in Thessalonica is a powerful example: it's one of the farthest-flung churches Paul is able to plant. From there, all of Europe is reached for Christ. Though the people of this young church have serious questions about the reason for their existence, Paul reassures them in 1 Thessalonians that they are fulfilling God's purpose just by being present in the world. Because they are **Embedded**, they stand as a witness to the power and love of Jesus Christ. They are examples of the faith, hope, and love that characterize the Christian life. The church embedded is an insurgency, toppling the kingdoms of this world by sharing the reality of the Kingdom of God.

**BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT • 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 • Tim McConnell • June 4, 2017**

“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. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13) Oh boy, that’s my favorite verse! Hold your pastor in the highest regard! You all memorize that! This week marks my first year with you as your lead pastor. I am so very grateful for how you have ‘acknowledged’ me, welcomed and loved me and my family—my wife Abigail, my children—we have been so blessed. Ministry isn’t always easy. In my last church I would drive to a group of hospitals called Pill Hill and between church and Pill Hill was Arby’s Corporate Headquarters. Every once in a while I would have this conversation with the Lord. “Lord, why don’t I just pull in there! You know I could sell some roast beef sandwiches! That would be so much easier!” And the Lord would gently nudge me. “Tim, if you love me feed my sheep—and not roast beef sandwiches.” Okay, Lord. Open the Bible. Study. Find the next message. And you know what, it’s an honor and I wouldn’t have it any other way. I’m grateful for you and how you acknowledge the work.

After running a lap with you for a full year, I can say—I always knew it but now I can say it with confidence—this is a great church. This is an amazing church! I’m blown away. Not just, as the video says, the 144-year history of faithfulness. But I’m blown away by you; by the gifts and experiences and passions the Lord has gathered together right here and right now. I believe God is about to do something enormous and beautiful. I believe this church is about to grow stronger and fuller, exercising greater influence, reaching more souls than ever before. There is something happening in this city. God is up to something. This is the 40<sup>th</sup> largest city in America, and people are moving back downtown in droves. Most cities have lost their downtown churches, but not Colorado Springs. We are here. And other healthy churches are here. Imagine a body of believers worshipping downtown every week so large that the city notices, that the culture of the city shifts, that the reputation of Christianity is altered,

the nation sees a city changed, and Colorado Springs becomes a model for the restoration of human flourishing in partnership with churches in the name of Jesus Christ. Imagine that. Imagine God doing something enormous and beautiful through you. It can happen, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It has happened before.

Today is Pentecost. It’s the day we mark the birth of the church. Not First Pres, the *church* universal, “catholic” (not Roman Catholic—that’s just one branch). Universal; in all times in all places. The church was born when the believers were gathered in Jerusalem after the ministry of Jesus, after His life, death and resurrection, after Jesus went up into heaven, the believers were gathered for Pentecost which was a festival of the Word, a celebration of the Word of God. And as they celebrated the Word of God the Holy Spirit came upon them and blew among them like fire, and they were transformed. The Spirit of God can transform you. You can become a totally different person than you were just before. You have the same face, the same name, same body, you carry the same driver’s license, but you are totally different by the power of the Holy Spirit. That happened to these believers and the church was born. And because that happened in Jerusalem, it was possible to happen again. It happened in Antioch. It happened in Ephesus, in Corinth, in Thessalonica. The church is born by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit of God blows and gathers and makes the church. Back in chapter one, our theme verses: “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.” (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8) So you became a model, embedded and faithful, because by the Spirit of God you received the message (the gospel) with joy even in the middle of the mess. So the message of Jesus rang out from you. You are embedded. Your presence is God’s purpose.

Because it happened there, it could happen again in Constantinople and Nicaea, in Rome, in Paris, in London, in Edinburgh and Dublin. Because it happened there it could happen in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis. Because it happened there in Jerusalem by the power of the Spirit of God, it could happen right here in Colorado Springs—and it did, and it is happening right now. How did the church come to be? How did we come to know Jesus and be saved by His grace, and come to serve Him as Savior and Lord, and come to reflect His glory and grace like gold in the granite, and come to reflect the light of heaven? How? The Spirit of God. The Spirit of the Living God. By the power of the Spirit.

Look at verses 16-24: "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit..." and on and on. Many think these are headings for a worship service. See how punchy these lines are? It's like Paul handed them their bulletin and said, "Remember? This is what we do." Rejoice. Pray. Give Thanks. Experience the Spirit and presence of God. Then the prophecies—this is reference to the Word of God. The Word was called "the Law and the Prophets." Receive the Word, measure and understand it. Then the blessing of peace in verse 23, and the mysteries of sanctification—you are going to keep growing in holiness after this. It's a worship service. Our worship this morning follows this same pattern, in both the Sanctuary and the Worship Center. The very same. "Remember, worship like this." Why? Because this is how we live. We worship like this because we want to live like this. Worship shapes us for life. I love that we've been running around with our worship bulletins taking selfies under #FirstPresEmbedded, because it seems that's exactly what Paul did to encourage these believers. He handed them their worship order—Remember? Life in Christ runs like this. Rejoice, pray, give thanks in God's presence, receive God's Word, grow in holiness and move out in peace. Just like this. We worship like this to live like this.

Let's run through it more carefully. "Rejoice always," verse 16. That's pretty comprehensive

isn't it? Rejoice always. I worship this way because I want to live this way. I worship like that to live like that. Rejoice always. It doesn't mean 'always' now does it? Paul didn't know the existential angst of my generation—the vague sense of dissatisfaction of our common era. I don't think Paul was acquainted with suffering. Eh... Rejoice always. When my kids are driving me crazy. Rejoice always. When my job is going nowhere and my boss is the worst. Rejoice always. When I'm scared of my future. Rejoice always. When I'm on a hospital bed waiting for my body to heal. Rejoice always. When I'm at my final hour, and my strength is sapping away. Rejoice always. "Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18) This might take some training. I worship like this to live like this. It isn't easy. But it is possible—and when it happens, you reflect the light of heaven in the darkest places of life. I may not be able to give thanks *for* all circumstances, but I can give thanks and praise *in* all circumstances. Rejoice.

Live in the Word. "Do not treat prophecies" (the Word of God) "with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22) Live in the Word of God. Don't hold the Bible in contempt. Study the Word of God, receive it, and try to live it out. Hold on to good and turn away from evil as God defines good and evil in His Holy Word. Worship this way to live this way. Live in the Word.

How? It's right in the middle. Verse 19 – "Do not quench the Spirit." By the power of the Holy Spirit you are able. You are able to lift a song of praise in the darkest hour, knowing that when you are about to let go, God holds on to you by the power of the Spirit. You are able to hear and understand and often even obey the Word of God, not by your power but by the power of the Spirit of God. When you come to Christ, it isn't that you were living one direction, found some information about Christian living then decided to live another direction. No. You were dead in your trespasses and sins and were brought to life by the power of the Spirit of God. You were in darkness and the light of Christ broke out over you by the power of the Spirit of God. You were

in chains and in prison and the chains broke and the prison door blew open by the power of the Spirit of God. Do not quench the Spirit. The Spirit lights a fire of faith in you. Don't dismiss it. Don't throw a wet blanket over the Spirit. Don't assume that the real world is the non-spiritual world and the spiritual world is nothing. Do not quench the Spirit. The Holy Spirit lights a fire of faith in you. Nurture it. Fan the flame. The Holy Spirit blows on the coals on the altar of your heart until the flame bursts up. Fan the flame. When your heart is on fire, no matter what you face, you can offer a sacrifice of praise. I want to worship this way because I want to live this way.

God is doing things. Things enormous and beautiful. The church we have been, we have been by the power of the Spirit. The church we are right now, today, we are by the power of the Spirit. What God is about to do, God is about to do by the power of the Spirit. Do not quench the Spirit. I want us to be embedded and faithful. I want us to live as though our presence is God's purpose. I want to shine the light of heaven as much as I can for my Lord Jesus. I can only do it – I can only hope to do it by the power of the Spirit of God. And as we go to the table, I close this message and this series with these words from verse 24. How do we know God will continue to do things in His church enormous and beautiful? How do we know? "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it." (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

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## STUDY GUIDE

### "Embedded: By the Power of the Spirit" I Thessalonians 5:12-24

#### Start It

- There are two views of the Apostles Creed. Some break it up into ten or twelve headings or topics. But others see it as three articles of faith: faith in the Father, faith in the Son, and faith in the Holy Spirit. To see it this way, we must understand everything that follows "I believe in the Holy Spirit..." to be a description of the activities of the Holy Spirit. The church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, the life everlasting, these are all things the Holy Spirit performs or makes happen. I agree with the three-articles view. The church is the work of the Spirit of God.

#### Study It

- Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. We skipped this very important passage in our sermon series. What does it say about the end times? The sum of teaching on the end times is this: be ready for Jesus to return at any moment. How would this help the Thessalonian church?
- Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. How do we honor those who labor in the spiritual things on our behalf? Why is that acknowledgement important?
- Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24. These are Paul's final instructions on the Christian life. Compare these short verses to our worship bulletin from Sunday. Does Paul's teaching read like an order of worship to you? How does our worship shape our life?
- Looking back over this entire letter now, what are three things that helped this young church survive a difficult period? What does verse 24 teach us about relying on God?

#### Pray It

*Lord Jesus, by Your Spirit You call Your church into being. You are its Lord, You are its Savior, and You are its Head. We thank You for calling us to be a part of Your church. So guide and direct our activities today that we may be a responsive and active body with You alone as our Head, that Your church may thrive and bring many children to salvation and more glory to Your holy name. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

#### Live It

Spend five minutes each day this week praying specifically for your church.