

The Fainthearted and Weak

We say it over and over, the Christian life was never meant to be a solo journey. We need each other! We see this truth loud and clear in the passage that we are focusing on today. As Paul brings his letter to Thessalonians to an end, he gives a number of rapid-fire commands. These commands were important for the health of the Thessalonian church just as they are for us. And although all of these commands are important, today we are focusing our attention on one verse – helping the fainthearted and the weak (v. 14).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

1. What sticks out to you in this section?
2. How would you generally summarize the nature of the commands in these verses?
3. What attitudes underlie Paul's various commands?
4. In verse 12, Paul says, "request," but in verse 14, he says, "urge." Do you think there is any significance that he uses a stronger word for the commands in verse 14? If so, what?

Steve said:

Paul doesn't say **how** we are supposed to encourage the fainthearted. How you encourage others will depend on your giftedness, your experience, your availability, and many other things. You will need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in knowing what to say and not say. Ephesians 4:29 says to speak those words that "meet the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." Discerning the need of the moment is hard work; very few people do this. Most people say the first thing that pops into their minds. If you and I are going to encourage the fainthearted, we will need to discern the need of the moment.

5. In addition to timely, well chosen words, what others things can we do to encourage the fainthearted?

Steve said:

Paul is referring to those who are weak spiritually, those whose faith is not strong. As with the faint-hearted, Paul has a very specific challenge for the rest of the church: *help* the weak. The term “help” is sometimes translated “cling to” (Titus 1:9) or “be devoted to” (Luke 16:13) someone or something. That’s exactly what those who are spiritually weak need, someone who will stick by them and do whatever they can to strengthen their faith. They don’t primarily need people to talk to them; they need people to stick with them and help them.

6. What ideas come to mind when you think about ways to help the weak by “stick[ing] with them and help[ing] them?”

Steve said:

The challenges in this verse are for the entire church. All of us are to “admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, and be patient with all of them.” This is a foundational ministry in the church. Like Paul, I am urging/imploring you to pay attention to and notice the spiritual condition of others here at Faith. If you aren’t paying attention to others and helping them get through the tough times in their lives, people are suffering alone in ways they shouldn’t. I am also urging you to admit when you are faint-hearted or weak and to receive the encouragement or help that others can give.

7. How well are you paying attention to other’s spiritual condition these days?
8. Who are those in your circle of relationships for whom you should pay attention?
9. Is there anything personally that is causing you to lose heart or to feel weak these days?