

A Life Pleasing to God
1 Thessalonians
6.22.25 **Kaleb Chang**

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15, 18b – ESV

¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.... for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Good morning, church!

It is so good to be with you this morning. For those of you I haven't met yet, my name is Kaleb Chang. I'm one of the lay elders here at CoaH Brookline. My wife, Celina, and I have been part of this church family since waaaay back in September of 2010—back when we were still meeting over at the Driscoll School in Washington Square.

Our son Jesse was born here in Boston in 2013, and like many of the little ones who were dedicated last week, he was dedicated right here at CoaH.

From early on, Celina and I jumped into a community group, and over the years, we've had the joy of leading several CGs. These days, we're facilitating the "Chang CG" on Thursday nights. I've been serving as a lay elder for a number of years now—though to be honest, I've kind of lost track of how many!

A few weeks ago, Tyler sent a message out to the lay elders asking if anyone might be willing to preach while the staff pastors were away this weekend. <Pause, smile> So... I volunteered. <Pause> I said, "Yes".

Let me just say—I am **so grateful** for our pastors—Bland, Mike, and Tyler. God has clearly gifted each of them, and I count it a joy and a privilege to serve alongside them and the rest of our elders here at CoaH. I especially want to thank Tyler and Bland for their support in helping me prepare today's message—and Bland in particular, for coaching me through the process with encouragement and wisdom.

Also—I want to thank my wife Celina, and to so many of you, for your prayers and support. I don't take this lightly.

So before we dive into the Word together, would you join me in a brief prayer?

<Prayer> ***“He must increase, but I must decrease.” Amen.**

If you’ve been journeying with us the past few months, then you know we’ve been in a sermon series titled, "*A Life Pleasing to God*"—rooted in the book of 1 Thessalonians in the New Testament.

This letter is the very first one the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica—this was the biggest city in Macedonia, second only to Athens in terms of size and influence. Paul was writing to encourage and strengthen these new believers—reminding them of their new life in Christ, their bond with Paul and the other missionaries, and giving them some key instructions for what it means to live as followers of Jesus in their context.

By the way—if you ever want to revisit a previous sermon or catch up on a week you missed, we’ve got them all posted on our **CoaH Brookline YouTube channel**. And I highly recommend it—our pastors have done a remarkable job walking us through this series. Also, as a plug and as a reminder, our next House of Prayer time is coming up soon on Saturday, July 12th, 5 pm at the 133. More details to come next week but please mark your calendars.

Now—when we talk about "*a life pleasing to God*," we’re not talking about something we can just *will* ourselves into doing. This kind of life isn’t something we grind out in our own strength. It’s a **SUPER-natural** life—a life that’s only possible as we rely on the Holy Spirit.

That reliance on the Spirit protects us from falling into two extremes:

- On one hand, *legalism*—thinking we can earn God's favor through performance.
- And on the other, *passivity*—just waiting for God to do everything while we sit on the sidelines as spectators.

Living in a city like Boston—a transient, globally-minded, intellectually vibrant place like Thessalonica was—it’s easy to feel overwhelmed or burned out trying to live out our faith. But depending on the Spirit turns God's commands from burdens into **opportunities**—moments for His power to shine through our weakness. It grows our faith. It causes fruit to flourish in our community. And it shows the world something different—something beautiful. It shows them Jesus.

Last week, Pastor Bland preached on verses 12 and 13, where Paul starts this final section of the letter with instructions on how to love and honor leaders in the church.

Today, we're continuing in verses 14 and 15. These are short verses—but packed with insight. Let me read them again:

“And we urge you, brothers and sisters: admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.”

Amen.

Now... How? How do we do that?

How do we live this out in a world that is so broken, so confusing, so quick to push us around?

I want to point you ahead just a few verses to 1 Thessalonians 5:18—Paul ends that sentence with this phrase:

“...for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

This—this life of love, patience, and goodness—is the will of God for you. For me. For us.

So today, I want us to explore this “Life Pleasing to God” under three headings:

Rebuke in Love

Restore with Compassion

Remember and Respond

1. Rebuke in Love – Admonish the Idle

This word “admonish” in the Greek literally means “*to put something into someone’s mind.*” It’s not harsh. It’s not cold. It’s a **gracious, ongoing correction** aimed at helping someone step back into alignment with God’s purposes.

In context, Paul is talking about those who are *idle*—people who are disruptive, disorderly, neglecting their responsibilities, maybe even critical of others but unwilling to contribute themselves.

Let me paint a fictional—but familiar—picture:

[Insert Carol story here in spoken, engaging tone—summarize as needed depending on time.]

Carol had been part of the women’s ministry for years. She showed up regularly but didn’t help with the behind-the-scenes work—no setup, no cleanup. While others served, she often stayed on the sidelines, chatting or scrolling on her phone.

She was outspoken about her passion for “discipleship,” but that often looked like critiquing others—pointing out flaws in parenting or marriages, sometimes questioning the leaders' spiritual maturity. Quietly, she stirred doubt.

At one planning meeting, she insisted the group cancel a service event in favor of “spiritual warfare prayer.” When her idea wasn’t adopted, she grew offended and began privately messaging others, sowing division.

Eventually, two mature women invited her for coffee. With grace and firmness, they shared how her words and actions were harming the group—and reminded her of Paul’s call to admonish the idle, help the weak, and seek the good of all.

At first, she resisted. But through ongoing love and truth, she came to see her part. She started serving quietly, apologized to the group, and her gifts began to bless others—this time in humility.

Now the point is this: **Admonition isn’t about proving someone wrong.** It’s about restoring someone to their purpose in Christ. It’s not fueled by frustration—but by love. It’s not rooted in preference—but in Scripture.

And when we do this as a church, we create a culture where **grace and truth walk hand-in-hand.**

Paul goes on - not only does he call us to rebuke in love, he calls us also, to restore with compassion:

2. Restore with Compassion – Encourage the Fainthearted, Help the Weak, Be Patient with All

Let’s break that down.

Encourage the fainthearted – These are the discouraged, the anxious, the spiritually weary. What they need isn't a lecture—it's presence. Sometimes just walking with them, listening, and loving them is more powerful than quoting a dozen verses.

Help the weak – This means stepping in with real, tangible support. Maybe it's someone struggling financially, physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Helping doesn't always mean solving—but it always means *showing up*.

Be patient with everyone – Because growth takes time. Because change takes time. Because healing takes time.

Let me share with you the story of Martha... [Insert Martha story in a conversational tone]

A young woman named Martha joined a CG after recently moving to Boston. She was a new Christian, overwhelmed by life in a new place, struggling with anxiety, and unsure of her faith. She rarely spoke up, and some weeks she didn't show up at all.

Instead of letting her drift away, Shelley, one of the group members, began sending her gentle texts after each meeting: *"We missed you tonight—just wanted you to know we're here if you need anything."* She followed up consistently, never pressuring Martha, just encouraging her to stay connected.

That's **encouragement**—not just comforting words, but an ongoing, relational effort to calm fear and build confidence.

When Martha finally shared that she was struggling with rent and couldn't afford groceries, the group stepped in. Two people brought her meals, someone helped her find a part-time job, and others prayed with her regularly.

That's **help**—meeting practical and spiritual needs, not from a distance, but with hands-on, personal care.

There were times when Martha pulled back again or got frustrated with herself. The group didn't give up on her. They listened, prayed, and gave her space to grow. It wasn't always easy—some members had to resist the urge to fix her—but they stayed committed and gentle.

This is what it means to restore with compassion:

Encourage. Help. Be patient.

It's not flashy. It's not always easy. But it reflects the heart of Christ.

<Transition> **Patience - certainly, we all need it for the third movement:**

3. Remember and Respond – Don't Repay Evil for Evil, But Seek to Do Good

This one's hard.

Paul calls us to a different standard—a **radical standard**. Not just *avoid revenge*, but to **actively pursue good**, even to those who wrong us.

One of the clearest pictures of this comes from the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

[Insert MLK bombing story—speak it slowly, let it land.]

During the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King faced relentless threats, insults, violence, and injustice. One night in 1956, his home was bombed while his wife and baby daughter were inside. A crowd gathered, angry and ready to fight.

But Dr. King stepped outside and said:

*“We must meet hate with love. We must meet physical force with soul force.
We must love our enemies.”*

Dr. King chose the way of Christ—the way of **mercy, truth, and love in the face of evil**. That wasn't a weakness. That was **Spirit-empowered courage**.

Paul says—don't mirror the world's rage. Reflect Christ's mercy.
Don't repay evil—**redeem** it through Christ.

Now let me ask you—because this is where belief turns into action (as it says in James 1:22):

The only way we become this kind of community is if each of us is seeking to live this out by God's grace.

So, are you open to rebuking a brother or sister in love— AND are you open to receiving that from them?

Are you quick to restore others with compassion, or do you find yourself holding a grudge, avoiding taking on the burdens of others to help lift them out—or maybe even judging the weak (from the verse) instead?

And what about grace? Are you quick to remember God's grace to you and extend that to others—or do you find yourself wanting them to really pay when they've wronged you?

I ask these questions to myself often.

Conclusion

Now... maybe you're hearing all this and thinking,
"Wow. That's a lot."
And it *is*.

We hear stories of people like Dr. King, or Corrie ten Boom, or Mother Teresa—and we're inspired... but also, maybe a little discouraged. We wonder, *Could I ever really live like that?*

Let me remind you—**this Word is for you.**
Not just for the "super Christians."
This is God's will... **in Christ Jesus... for you.**

So as we close:

Only through the Holy Spirit of God can we:

- **Rebuke in Love**
- **Restore with Compassion**
- **Remember and Respond**

Let's become a church that is known not for perfection, but for grace.
A people who seek to please God not by striving harder, but by depending deeper on

Him.

Let's live this out—in our CGs, our homes, our friendships, our workplace, even with strangers.

Why?

Because this...

This *is* the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

All this in Jesus' name we say, "Amen!"

Response - Communion