

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

STUDY ELEVEN

Germs That Make Us Contagious

1 Thessalonians 5:16–22

When people are contagious, there's an influence that spreads from their lives that simply cannot be turned off. People want to know, "How come you're so much like that?"

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHO doesn't remember? Who went unscathed by the Coronavirus pandemic of this century? In 2020, COVID-19 sprung like a cobra, its venom crossing oceans and invading communities, holding the world hostage in its infectious grip.

Whether the disease is COVID-19 or some other contagious germ, a predictable pattern emerges: infection leads to contact, which leads to contagion. How easy it is to catch the wrong germs from another and then, without realizing it, spread them to someone else. That's how pandemics start. How well we remember!

But there are good, healthy contagions too.

People infected with the *right germs*—the right perspective, the right attitude, and the right behavior—are equally contagious. Their positive influence radiates as the midday sun. They inspire, they challenge, and they rebuke, even without words. They model the good way to live—Christ's way—and they encourage us to live that way too.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we continue where we left off with Paul's list of traits for healthy church relationships. These traits make our faith contagious, as we spread Christ's influence wherever we go.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As the Holy Spirit transforms us, God “uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere” (2 Corinthians 2:14). We become agents of transformation. As you open the Word, thank God for the privilege of sharing His influence in a spiritually needy world.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you recall from our study of 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15, the first items Paul listed were *kindly requested*. He asked that we respect our spiritual leaders and commit to “live peacefully with each other” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). The next things were *urgently needed*. Paul urged us to admonish the unruly, put courage into the disheartened, stay with the weak, be patient with everyone, and refuse to retaliate (see 5:14–15).

Now, in the next part of Paul’s list, he launched into traits that are *continually appropriate*. And then, Paul wrapped up his list with a couple of cautions . . . because some things are *occasionally uncertain*.

Take a moment to read [5:16–22](#) to overview this part of Paul’s list, noting the string of commands. How many do you find? What is your initial impression?



Observation: Encourage One Another By . . .

Paul zeroed in on qualities which are infectious by their design. They flow out of his command to “encourage each other and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). To “encourage” is to literally put courage into another. That’s the best kind of contagion!

As you observe Paul’s commands, notice how Paul grouped traits that naturally go together. There’s always more to see in Scripture, so take your time as you read the verses and answer the questions.¹

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Qualities That Are Continually Appropriate—1 Thessalonians 5:16–20

In a series of rapid-fire phrases, Paul succinctly arranged five qualities—three framed positively and two framed negatively. These are *continually* appropriate because Paul uses such words as *always*, *without ceasing*, and *in everything* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 NASB).

Read *1 Thessalonians 5:16–20* in the NLT, NASB, and NIV. For the table below, in the middle column record Paul’s qualities and in the right column craft your own paraphrase of those qualities.

Scripture	Quality	Paraphrase
5:16		
5:17		
5:18		
5:19		
5:20		

Always rejoice. I cannot name one thing that is more contagious than genuine joy. A person who is rejoicing always is one who is lighthearted in spirit, one who on occasion really enjoys a good laugh. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Qualities That Are Occasionally Uncertain—1 Thessalonians 5:21–22

Paul said not to “scoff at prophecies” (1 Thessalonians 5:20). But prophecies can be *occasionally uncertain*. So what warning and two guidelines did Paul also give in *1 Thessalonians 5:21–22*? How do these verses flow out of 5:20?

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How do these final two commands wrap up his full list from *1 Thessalonians 5:12–20*?

The only way to have a heart that's full of joy is to have a heart that's free of burdens. . . . How do you release burdens? Prayer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Qualities Under a Microscope

The apostle's second command to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NASB) is intertwined with his first command to “rejoice always” (5:16 NASB). Without prayer, joy is superficial, like painted-on smiles. Real joy flows out of a heart free of burdens, and the only way to be free of burdens is to release them through continual prayer.

What does “pray without ceasing” mean? One helpful paraphrase of this verse is “pray with the frequency of a hacking cough.” Whenever you feel a tickle of worry, pray. When fear irritates your peace, pray. When anger vexes your spirit, pray. With this word picture in mind, summarize how you see Paul's command relating to daily living.

Paul's command in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 NASB, “in everything give thanks” might confuse some believers. How can we be thankful for sin? Or sin's consequences? Or life's tragedies? The preposition Paul used, however, is “in” everything, not “for” everything. There is a significant distinction.

Discuss the difference that small preposition brings to your perspective of giving thanks. How does it make thankfulness more approachable? How does it dovetail into Paul's next clause, “for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus”?

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Through faith in Christ, we were “sealed” in Christ “with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13 NASB). This sealing with the Holy Spirit refers to our *position* in Christ and guarantees the Holy Spirit’s presence. But in *practice* we still may “stifle the Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19) or “quench the Spirit” (5:19 NASB).

Think of the Holy Spirit as a fire within us that warms us to the things of God, illumines truth in God’s Word, and burns away sin. How might we smother His fire in our hearts? What can we do to kindle His fire?

Apparently, some Thessalonian believers were dismissing all prophecy because a few false prophets were misleading the flock regarding Christ’s return. They were advocating quitting their jobs, depending on others’ generosity, and living as busybodies. But not all prophecies should be tossed aside. Instead, “test everything that is said” (5:21).

Below, comment on how each criterion listed helps us discern whether something is or isn’t from God.

Scripture: _____

Lordship of Christ: _____

Holy Spirit: _____

Not all prophecies come in the form of divine revelation. Prophecy is “the declaration of God’s mind spoken forthrightly in the power of the Spirit at just the right time.” What Paul is saying is, “Be sensitive to God’s voice. Because there are false prophets, this does not give you reason to believe that all prophets are false.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Contagious Living by the Holy Spirit

We become agents of transformation when we know and obey God’s Word and walk in the power of His Spirit. Like Moses, whose “face shone with the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 3:7), we “reflect the glory of the Lord” as the Spirit “makes us more and more like [Christ]” (3:18).

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However, by refusing to listen to the Spirit’s voice or by rejecting His prompting, we stifle His ministry. In [Ephesians 4:30](#), after encouraging believers to “put on the new self” (Ephesians 4:24) and avoid a series of sins, Paul gave us a warning. What did he say? How does this verse correlate with [1 Thessalonians 5:19](#)?

The child of God cannot lose the Spirit of God. So it’s not a question of living my life separate from the Spirit of God but living my life with Him on hold, allowing my life to become so self-serving that He steps away, folds His arms, and waits for me. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Courage to Be a Contagious Christian

We’ve reviewed the required qualities. Let’s see if you’re ready to receive them as your own. Here are three steps to keep in mind. Each one begins with the letter R.

1. *Remember, the goal is to build up, to encourage others.* Every worthy contagion flows from this goal.
2. *Resist cheap imitations of spirituality.* Avoid practices like thoughtless, ritualistic prayers rather than mindful, unceasing prayer.
3. *Release your fear of what others may think or say.* If you’re convinced it honors and pleases God, don’t worry about ruffling some feathers. Have courage—live boldly for Christ!

From the list of traits we’ve reviewed, where are you most contagious? Which trait is most evident in your life? Do others see and are they drawn to Christ through those qualities? Thank the Lord for His work!

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Conversely, what traits do you struggle to incorporate in your life, even with the Spirit's power? Pray for the Lord's enablement.

Try to pray continually today—whenever you feel a tinge of worry, have a thought of comparison, or experience doubt or shame or fear. What does Paul's encouragement to “pray without ceasing” look like for you?

Are you contagious? Are you sharing in lived truth? Are you willing to be distinctly Christian, even if you ruffle some feathers? Revisit the list of steps above. Carry them out. You *will* be changed, and your transformation will be contagious!



A FINAL PRAYER

How grateful I am, Father, for the way Your Word addresses specific areas of my life always in need of attention. Father, thank You for Your lordship over every phase of my life. Thank You for Your truth. May it run now and have free course in my life as I've heard it and will now be living it out. I ask this in the great name of Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1984, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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