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# 1 THESSALONIANS 5:20-21

Series: Real Christians in Challenging Times

[PRAYER] Father, sometimes during this season I feel like we're on the Sea of Galilee with the storm all around. But we have Jesus in the boat who stands up and says, "Peace. Be still." So even in our own hearts we can experience a calmness while things are swirling around so fast it's hard to keep up. I pray, Lord, that you would use our connections as a church to bless people. I pray for those who aren't really connected right now, even some I've lost track of. But you know what's going on in their hearts and I pray that you would draw them back, that you would give us ways to connect with them, and that you'd use your church in a powerful way, not only for those who are presently attending, but also for those who haven't yet found Calvary Chapel Living Hope. Use our sharing this week with our neighbors, our friends, wherever we are. As we even share the sermon that's about to be shared here today, I ask, Lord, that you'd use it in people's lives. Grow our church even in the midst of the challenge and that you'd bless us. Increase our borders, even when we don't have a building to meet in. I pray that you'd grow your church. We know the church is people and it's very clear now that that's the case. So bless your word today as we look at it. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well this is an interesting passage today. You can open your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21. If you have your workbook you can pull it out and you can take notes in your workbook, although I know that we spent so much time in this passage of scripture from verses 12-22 some of you have run out of room. You're adding extra pieces of paper, trying to write on other pages in order to keep track of the notes for this.

Let me just tell you that probably the way that it's unfolding now as I end my study, we'll take two more weeks after today in the book of 1 Thessalonians and then we're going to go to the book of Genesis. So you might, if you like those little workbooks, order your book from [christianbooks.com](http://christianbooks.com) the little journal in Genesis so you can keep track. It's just a great way to allow God to continue to work and for you to share prayer requests in there and keep track of them for yourself to watch God work.

Well today we're going to look at 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21. What we're going to do is we're going to see how God takes scripture and takes a person and together they minister to our lives. Certainly that's happened to you. That sometimes God will use a person in your life and they'll share some Bible verse with you and you go, "I just really needed that." You see sometimes God shares with us directly from His word. We open it up and we look at it and we learn from it. Other times God speaks through a preacher on the radio, speaks through a sermon like I'm about to share, speaks through a friend who says, "Hey, why don't you look at this verse and think

about this.” When He does, that connects. Now God passes His grace onto us in that very powerful way.

We’re going to look at that particular connection today by looking at the term *prophecy*. What is prophecy? It's when God takes His word and uses a person to share that in a way that's relevant to our lives. So let me take our verse today. This is the passage we're going to look at. This is 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21. It says – *Do not despise prophecies, but test everything.*

*Do not despise prophecies, but test everything.* So let's start by just looking at that word *prophecies* and trying to understand what that means and what that looks like and how we apply that to our lives.

You have to understand that what I'm about to share with you is information, a teaching that is [I'm going to say] controversial. In other words some denominations emphasize this idea of prophecy and other spiritual gifts more than others do. Some would say prophecies have ceased. Others say that prophecies are really important. At Calvary Chapel Living Hope we believe that all spiritual gifts that are mentioned in the Bible in the gifts list are for today, that none of them have passed away or that they're gone. We also believe that God's word is primary as our authority for faith and for practice. The gift of prophecy, whether it's a gift or it's just being used in our actions with others, is very important. So we're going to take a look at this verse today and try to understand it, recognizing that there are some really good Christians who believe one way that prophecies don't exist today, and others who kind of go overboard and emphasize experiential faith more so than the truths of God's word. So we want to be careful, find ourselves in the middle. We're going to look at God's word and see what it has to say.

So I want to start by talking about the word *prophecy*. Let me give you what I think is a good definition for the word *prophecy*. Prophecy is declaring the word of God in a way that's relevant to a situation. Declaring the word of God in a way that's relevant to a situation. Probably the best example of prophecy nowadays is what you're seeing right now. That I've spent my week preparing a sermon or a teaching from the Bible. I'm presenting that to you and declaring God's word to you in a way that's relevant and practical for your lives.

The idea is that when you hear God's word spoken it will change you. We know that God's word is powerful. The Bible says of itself it's like a sword. It penetrates the thoughts and intentions of the heart. When you read it or someone shares a verse with you, either way when that takes place, God's word can speak to you in a powerful way and good things can happen. So prophecy is declaring the word of God in a way that's relevant to the situation.

I find this very important, especially in counseling. Just interacting with each other is important, but in counseling when someone is looking for advice they want help with their life. A biblical counselor is one who shares scripture. Why? Because my opinions can go here or there. Sometimes my opinions are good, sometimes they're not. Sometimes my opinions are lined up with God's word, sometimes they're just my own ideas. But if we can share a word from God that comes from His word in someone's life, it can speak to them in a deep way, in a way that other things might not be able to speak to them. So sharing God's word is powerful.

Let me give you an example. Over the last few weeks I've been working with an eleven-year-old young man and his family. This young man is doing great in his relationship with his siblings. But as I listen to him, there's one thing that makes him really mad at eleven years old and that's when injustice is taking place, when something's not fair. For example, if he perceives his parents are being unfair it makes him mad. Or when he sees two of his siblings playing and one of them is getting the upper hand, even if the other one isn't upset, he wants to step in and balance the scales. Or if he sees that one child is playing with someone else's toys without permission he'll sometimes want to step in there. It appears that he's being a troublemaker because he's creating a problem when he's really trying to enact justice. His emphasis on justice is so strong that it's hindering relationships.

So I started thinking about God's word because I can give him a lot of my ideas about that, but I shared with him James 2:13. I threw it up on the Zoom screen so he could see it and I said, "Why don't you read it to me." And he did. One of the things it says in James 2:13 is that *mercy triumphs over judgement*. What is mercy? What is judgement? Judgement has an emphasis on justice, right, wrong, and so on. You remember the story about Jesus who when they brought the woman who was caught in adultery to Him, He had mercy. *Mercy triumphs over justice*. What is mercy? We talked about that. Mercy has to do with relationship. It has to do with compassion and care. I said, "You're going to want to think about that. Because if you're always concerned about judgement and justice and fairness, you're going to be an angry person a lot. But if you can think about compassion and mercy, that can help you a lot in your life." Well it turns out that after the next few days that that verse really had an impact on him and our discussion was powerful in his life.

Now I believe that my interaction with him was effective in part because I used God's word and shared that with him. I shared with him a prophetic word. I didn't say to him, "Here's a word from the Lord for you." I didn't say to him, "Here's a prophecy you need to get." What I said to him was "here's a verse that I think might be helpful for you" and we read it together. That is what prophecy is.

As I prepare sermons on Sunday morning it's my desire that I can not only understand what the text is saying, what God is saying and what that writer, if it's Paul or Peter or John, whoever it is doing the writing, what did they mean in the context? What does that context look like? I want to ask that question, but I also want to ask the question how is this relevant to our lives? Because prophecy takes scripture and makes it practical and relevant to a person's life.

I want to be like Jonah, a prophet in the Old Testament that God used after Jonah got over his issues. God sent him to Nineveh and when he went to Nineveh Jonah preached a message that said you need to change your hearts. You need to repent or bad things are going to happen. I trust that God will use that in my life. That's a confrontational kind of prophecy where I can come and I can say you know you really need to change or bad things are going to happen to you. It's one of the kinds of prophecies that I think we can share.

Another one is just direction. We say here's a verse that might help you as you're trying to decide whether to buy that car or whether to change that job or how you're going to handle that relationship or whatever it is. There are scriptures that affect that. So if I can bring God's word

into a relevant situation I'm demonstrating this idea of prophecy in a person's life. But there's another kind of prophecy it seems where there's this affirmation. That sometimes we just say you know what, you're thinking about feeling insecure. That doesn't tie in with what God believes about you. God loves you. If you're saying bad things about yourself or you think you're worthless or not valuable, then you are missing God's truth. Let me share with you something that God has to say. So when I'm doing that I'm bringing a prophetic word into that person's life.

Now I think it's important for us to recognize that when we talk about prophecy there's some things that we need to overcome, some misconceptions as it were. Let me throw a few of those up here on the screen.

One: Prophecy is not just telling the future. There is a particular kind of prophecy that is future oriented. So when we look at the book of Daniel or the book of Revelation, we're seeing how the future is unfolding and we can learn about the future. That is a form of prophecy. That's not the primary way that it's used in the scripture. Rather it's this Elijah coming and confronting the Baal prophets. It's Daniel coming and demonstrating godliness by praying and saying I'm not going to neglect my prayer life. Or the three brave friends saying I'm not going to bow our knee to the image. This is prophecy. It's bringing God's word to bear in a practical way, not just telling the future.

The second one is that God's word is prophecy and it's the standard for testing others. This is important to realize. Because in some situations some people will take prophecy, that is they'll believe that they have a word for someone. "I'm going to share a word from the Lord for you." And they put that on equal plane as scripture. If we look at even our passage today which says *test the prophecies*, we see that there could be error. So we need to understand that the supreme prophecy is God's word itself. Nothing can compete with that. We don't need to add to scripture. It is there. What we can only do is apply it to our lives and sometimes to the lives of others.

So we want to know that because one of the applications you're going to come to in this sermon (I hope) is that you want to know God's word in a very extensive way. You want to be reading it, trying to understand it, applying it to your life so that when someone else is hurting you can offer a word of prophecy to them that is taking God's word and saying here's a verse that might be helpful for you. But you also use it to test the prophecies that you hear to make sure they're in line with what God is really saying. So that's the second thing that we see that I want to make sure we understand about prophecy.

The third one is that anyone can prophesy. Now there is in the scripture a prophetic office of prophet and there is a prophetic gift, the gift of prophecy like the gift of tongues or the interpretation of tongues. There's a gift of prophecy or the gift of teaching or exhortation or serving. Okay, we know that. But there's also this sense in which even though someone might have the gift of serving, that doesn't mean you have to have the gift of serving in order to help clean up after church. Okay. Everyone is a servant. In the same way we all have access to God's word. And so we all have this opportunity to prophesy. I want to make that clear.

I want to show you a scripture that illustrates this. Paul is speaking to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 14. There's some error going on in the church in their worship services and how

they're handling themselves. Paul is trying to correct that so they can balance things out better. One of the statements he makes in 1 Corinthians 14:31 is this: *For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be encouraged.* I think that that's first of all one of the statements about what prophecy is. Other people can learn and be encouraged. Encouraged to do what's right, encouraged to change their behavior. Encouraged to just think rightly about themselves. All of that is important and I think it's important for us to understand all of those things.

Now some people believe or think that prophecy just takes place spontaneously. That the Holy Spirit comes over someone and when He does then a word comes from them that's needed by someone else. And I suppose that does take place, definitely, I would suggest, but I don't think that's the norm of what happens. Most of the time what happens is that we're studying the Bible on a regular basis and we see how that passage can be used by someone else.

I want to be a prophet like Jeremiah. Jeremiah had preached all these sermons and he had a bunch of poetry and so then later in his life he gathered all of that and put it all into a book called the book of Jeremiah. God used him and helped him to be able to teach and to share and then it was put together in this book of Jeremiah. Many of the prophets used illustrations, and we do use illustrations when we teach to try to help people catch it and get an application. All of that is important.

So I would suggest what I'm doing during the week... So I start my sermon on Sunday or on Monday. Next week I will be teaching on good versus evil. Just in the next verse, verse 22 of our passage – good versus evil. I'm already starting to think about that on Monday. And then I start to develop and I want to know, God, where do you want me to take this in the life of our church. Tuesday I'm doing that some more. By Wednesday I usually have an idea of where we're going so that by Wednesday night when I get to our small group I can present some ideas or ask a question and I can get some feedback from the other people in the fellowship. I need a prophetic word in that moment as I'm continuing to prepare the sermon. It's a think tank for me in the Wednesday night small group. Anyone can join it. We certainly talk about the last week's sermon, but then we go on and we talk about the upcoming sermon.

One of the things I appreciate is sometimes I'll ask a question and Lorraine Brocious who has been in the word for years, she just kind of knows the Bible in all kinds of places, a lot of times she'll say, "You know I think the answer to the question may be in the context." So she's being careful that we're not taking a scripture out of context. But she's looking at the passage and saying, "I think we have something here that can answer the question right there in the text." Great way to have a response to the questions that many times I'm asking.

Caleb Bonilla is a different approach. Caleb kind of this eclectic guy. He thinks in pictures and he comes up with all kinds of ideas. But sometimes when we're working on a passage he'll say "that reminds me of" and he'll bring another verse from a different place in the Bible into the situation. I think prophetically he's saying this verse applies to what we're talking about right now. You see Caleb has been in the Bible for years. He's been a Christian since he was like three or seven or something like that. So he's been studying the scriptures and continues to do that. So he has his mind saturated with the Bible. So if someone says a topic, his mind starts racing and

he thinks of these verses that he's either thinking about now or that he's come to. So that becomes very helpful for us as we are studying God's word together.

I really appreciate Caleb's approach to God's word. He brings the passages of God's word into a practical way into our study. I'd encourage you to join with us on Wednesday night and be a part of that. It certainly is interesting and intriguing. And then of course some of the things you hear on Wednesday night and we talk about become part of my sermon. So I should regularly be giving credit to the Wednesday night group for their contribution and guidance for me as a pastor as I'm putting together the rest of the sermon.

And then on Thursday and Friday and Saturday I'm actually preaching the sermon to myself or to the mirror or to the computer just so I'm allowing the Lord speak it through me so that when I get up here on Sunday morning and I teach you, this is like the fourth time I've preached this sermon. Each time as I do, the Lord speaks to me in a different way and I go, "Oh yeah, this would be helpful." And God uses that in my life.

Now as it's coming to you, you have a responsibility. That's what prophecy is. Prophecy is out there and we have two verbs now in our passage that you need to consider when you're hearing a word from the Lord or someone's sharing a Bible verse. When you hear that you need to know how to think about that.

So let's go back to our passage again in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21. The first thing we want to do is look at this word – *Do not despise. Do not despise prophecies*. The idea there when we talk about despising prophecies is that don't make them worthless in your mind. That's what the word means. Don't treat them as if they are worthless because they are very valuable. They are important. We don't treat them casually, lightheartedly. We recognize that this is the word of God. When someone shares a Bible verse with us and does it in a personal way, we need to take it seriously because God may be saying something to us right now that applies to our situation, and we need that. Every one of us in our lives are trying to maneuver through life. Every one of us has unique challenges that we face in our lives. Decisions we're making, pressures we're feeling. All of those things are taking place. God wants to guide us; He wants to lead us. Sometimes, as we saw last week, He does it directly through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes into us and guides us into all truth, many times actually using the Bible to influence us. Now we're talking about a person being involved in that process and they bring a verse to us and help us to understand what God has for us.

It's very important do not despise prophecies. We need to take them seriously. Not only do we take them seriously when we're receiving them, we take them seriously when we're sharing them. Don't treat them as worthless.

As I was pondering that, I was remembering a story. When my family was preparing to go to Africa to be missionaries, the mission organization required that we go through training. We had to go live in Pearl River in New York for a while and every day we were involved in the training for two to three weeks. I don't know how long exactly it was, but a lot of time. And they were talking about counseling, they were sharing with us about culture shock. They were preparing us for going over to the mission field and knowing how to experience the things that we would

experience there. They told us on this one particular afternoon we're bringing in a Muslim imam to talk to you because we want you to be sensitive to the issues of the Muslim faith. We are missionaries. We know that Islam lacks the truth. That people who only believe in Islam don't know God actually and they are missing out on who Jesus Christ is and the power of the gospel. But in order to understand and care for people who are Muslims, we needed to be able to understand them a little bit better.

So this imam comes in. Now we didn't know it, but this guy wasn't really an imam. He was a missionary to Muslims. He understood Muslims and so he was going to share with us as if he was an imam.

So this was a very interesting experience. It got very uncomfortable for us as missionaries as we're sitting there. He started very friendly, talking about Islam, talking about holidays and other things that they do. But then he started becoming more antagonistic with us. He started attacking us. One of the things he said, although it was all kind of this hypothetical thing that was going on, really struck me. Because I thought he was actually an imam. He was saying, "You guys, let's just compare the way we treat our book and you treat your book. In the Koran we would never... Look at you guys. You put your Bibles on the floor. We would never put our holy book on the floor. We value our book. You guys say you read your book, but many of you just leave it on the shelf or wherever you put it all week. You don't actually get into it. You don't read it."

I was just struck by that situation. You know, it is true that the book is only a paper and it only represents the word of God. That's God's word in our lives. I don't think there's anything wrong with putting it on the ground. But if we're disrespecting it in our lives, we're not reading it then we're viewing it as something that's worthless. I never want to do that. I value God's word so much in my life.

Well this guy kind of drew the whole thing to an intense point. Some of the missionaries were defending and it was quite antagonistic there for a moment before he revealed what was going on to try to give us this picture of what it might be like to engage with someone from the Muslim faith.

I just want to suggest that we want to be careful with prophecy. First of all we want to value them. God may speak through someone else when someone quotes a verse and we need to be aware of that in our lives. We need to understand what that looks like.

Let me share with you a few more verses about this idea so we understand this idea of prophecy. We don't despise prophecies. 1 Peter 4:11 is a fascinating verse. Peter is talking about the spiritual gifts. He says this: *If anyone speaks...* See he's dividing speaking gifts and serving gifts into these two different categories. He says – *If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.* Along that line he says – *If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.*

It is so powerful here to realize that God uses people to pass on His grace to others. And when God's word is in the mouth of a person, you want to recognize that as something so valuable that

you're speaking the very words of God to someone. It means you need to be very careful about what you say to someone, how you use scripture. You also need to recognize when someone is sharing a word, God might be speaking right through them to you when they share a Bible verse to you that's very important.

You know I love to tell parents one of the things you can do as your children are getting older is to say to them, "You're my brother or sister in Christ. God can speak to me through you." I would encourage you, you say to your son or daughter, "When you're having your quiet time and you're reading your devotions and God speaks to you, maybe He's saying something to you that I need to hear. Why don't you tell me what is God teaching you. How is He applying it to your life? As He shares that to you, maybe God will speak to me." Because God speaks to parents through children and God speaks to children through parents. And God speaks to husbands and wives through their mates. And God speaks to friends through other friends. When we can speak and share God's word, sometimes it's as if the very words of God are coming to that person and that person walks away saying, "Wow, I need to think about this some more in my life."

Let me show you another verse. In James 3:1 it says – *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.* Why will teachers be judged more strictly? Because they are passing on the word of God in a way that's affecting the minds and behavior of other people. We can't mislead people. We must study the scripture. We must take it to heart what God is saying to us. And we must do it with integrity. We can't just pass on words flippantly because the things a teacher says are listened to and sometimes God speaks through that teacher in a way that brings change into a person's life.

Let me show you one more. Paul is encouraging young Timothy as a pastor. 2 Timothy 2:15 says – *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

I think one of the big applications for us in today's sermon is we need to know God's word. We need to know how to study it, we need to know what it means. You don't want to come away from the Bible or sit around in a group and say something like this: Well here's what it means to me. If you're making that statement "here's what it means to me" you're missing the idea of studying the Bible. What you want to do is find out what does the Bible mean to God and what is He saying. Now when we say "here's what it means to me" maybe we're saying here's the application of what it means to my life. That's different. But we're not interpreting God's word based on our experience. There are some people who put experience above the Bible and they evaluate the Bible based on their experience. I'll take and pick and choose whatever I think I need to support my arguments. That's a misunderstanding of the use of God's word. We want to put God's word over us so we are submitting to the things God's word says and what God wants to experience or say through others in our lives.

Let's go back to our main verse today. Notice it says – *Do not despise prophecies, but test everything.* Why do you have to test everything? Well the reason you have to test everything is because there's a human element to prophecy. That's the point here. When you take God's word and put it together with human thought and it comes to a person there is room for error to take



place. Not in God's word itself, but in the application of God's word. When someone takes God's word and tries to use it, they may make a statement.

I use illustrations in my sermons to help the truths of God's word to become relevant to our lives. Sometimes people remember the illustrations more than the verse. Those illustrations better be clear and they better be right on in order to illustrate the passage. As a teacher I need to be careful of that.

There is a human element in prophecy that we must consider. That means you need to test every prophecy. Every time someone uses God's word or says something to you, you need to decide is this from God for me or not? Or is this someone who has a human idea that's passing on to us or to me and it's not for me or it's not being used properly.

How do we test? Well we don't want to test based on how we feel or what we think. That's not our test. Our test is what does God's word say? We always use the Bible as our authority to evaluate anything. So if someone comes up with something that is incorrect or out of context or an incomplete idea, then we need to test that and we need to measure it. We need to be careful about how that's being used.

Another way that we test God's word or a word that comes from God through a person is demonstrated again in the passage in 1 Corinthians 14 where they're correcting error in the worship service because it was kind of like chaos in the worship service. So Paul is giving some instructions. He's saying – *Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.* In other words there's this evaluation taking place with prophecy to make sure that what's being said is being said correctly and being used correctly. Sometimes people use God's word in ways that support their own ideas, but aren't really God's word. So testing God's word is important. Discerning. We need to ask ourselves a very important question: Is this from the Lord?

For example, let me show you some verses that are commonly taken out of context. One is – *Judge not, lest you be judged.* That's an actual verse in the Bible in Matthew 7:1. But if you're using that verse to say don't judge me for my wrongs, then that's a misuse of the verse because there's plenty of other verses that talk about our responsibility as Christians to discern, to confront, to judge, and so on.

Philippians 4:13 is a great verse. I encourage you to memorize it. Children should all memorize this verse. *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* But you can't say we're going to win this basketball game because I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Or I'm going to shoot the next basket and it's going to go in because I can do all things. That's a misunderstanding of the verse. So we have to take the verse in context.

Another one, Romans 8:28, and I'm sure you're familiar with this: *All things work together for good.* That is a quote from Romans 8:28. But if you don't look at the rest of the verse you're likely to get discouraged. In fact I would suggest that an improper use of God's word can lead a person to discouragement and to lose sight in what God has for them. They can start to believe that God doesn't fulfill His promises, that God doesn't care about them in some way. That's a

real sad thing that takes place. So the way we use scripture is important. We want to share it with each other.

One of the beautiful things about being in a church, interacting with others, is that we all know or we're growing in God's word and we're able to share with each other. We come away from a gathering with something that can help us live in the rest of our lives. I often say regarding our Sunday morning gathering when we're all together gathering that the most important words said today may not come from my mouth, but they might come from someone else as you have a discussion. So our fellowship time is important. When people come early or stay late and hang around, it gives opportunity for people to hear what's going on in people's lives and to share requests and to have the Lord speak into their lives in some very important ways.

If we look at this idea of our verse today – *Do not despise prophecies, but test everything*. I would suggest that prophecy is this declaring of the word of God in a way that's relevant to a situation. I often don't say "this is a word from the Lord for you." I want to express humility because of the human element that exists here. What I'll often say is "I believe this is a word from the Lord for you" or "I have a verse I'd like to share with you. I think this might be helpful." But in the midst of that, prophecy is taking place and a person is experiencing God in a special way.

I want to draw your attention just for a moment back in closing to John Snee's testimony. Because he was just explaining about the Barn, but then he went into a little bit of an exhortation there. Remember there? He said, "Hey I want to encourage everybody, come out to the Barn. God did not give us a spirit of fear." He took a scripture and he applied it to a specific situation about coming out to the Barn. I expect that that verse that he shared is a prophetic word for some people. Not for everyone. But some people will recognize that maybe it's fear that's keeping them away from the Barn and some people will say, "You know what, I think maybe I need to go there." That was an example of John using a prophetic word. Your job is to test that or evaluate it. Is it something for you?

I think that as we continue look at God's word and allow God to speak to us, we'll have tremendous benefit. Mainly we see prophecies taking place in three ways. One is to confront us, to say you're going in the wrong direction. Secondly is to direct us to say I think this is where you need to go. And thirdly, to affirm what God is doing in our lives and who we are. Those are three different kinds of prophetic words. I encourage you to think about those, ask yourself questions about them, use them with your children. Help them to understand who God is and what He's doing. Use them with your friends. Because as you take God's word and apply it to people's lives, you're engaging in something that's very powerful – passing on the grace of God to other people.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, we ask now that you'd be working in each one of our hearts. Help us to know, Lord, how to apply the truths of this passage and other passages that we read. Lord, thank you for the many ways that we can experience you and understand you. We thank you for your word that's taught by so many great teachers today that we can listen to on the radio or that we

can gather together and we can exchange scripture passages. And they affect us. We go away thinking. We know that, Lord, and thank you for your word and how powerful it is. Teach us how to use it effectively in our lives as we interact together. Lord, I pray especially for those right now who are challenged in a particular area or are discouraged by something in their lives, some life event, or relationship, or financial challenge, whatever it might be. Lord, I pray that you'd bring healing, restoration, and direction today. Use today as a special day of your grace in people's lives. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.