

## **Season 6, Episode 8: Real Church**

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**Felicity:** This season is sponsored by Crossway. As Christians, we all want to be living out our gospel identity, and the world of social media presents a constant battleground as we work out what it is to be holy in the digital realms. Paul Tripp's new book, *Reactivity* helps us with the challenges by helping us drill down to the heart level reasons as to why we react and respond to others as we do. This is a helpful, pertinent book that makes us think twice before we tweet or post and encourages us to glorify God in every medium. Grab a copy wherever you get your books.

**Sarah:** Welcome to two sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Sarah, I live in the UK. This is my sister Felicity, she lives in the States. And today we are getting into the final part of the letter, the second half of chapter five of First Thessalonians. Felicity, good to see you. Now, I'm presuming you've got your cup of tea ready. Tell me what your thoughts are on tea and biscuits at church after the service finishes. What's the vibe over with you?

**Felicity:** Oh, Sarah, I long for tea and biscuits after church. We don't have it. I feel like we and I say we, my husband and I have been petitioning for it just quietly amongst amongst the gathered. Imagine if you had a hot drink in your hand right now as we're trying to do the conversation. We meet in a school, so it's a kind of school hall kind of vibe. I feel like tea and biscuits would really enhance that vibe quite a lot. I was trying to explain to my friends, it's not so much about the quality of the tea or in fact even the quality of the biscuits, it's.

**Sarah:** Just about how there's no quality of the biscuits, is there?

**Felicity:** They're kind of the 18 p ones from Asda, aren't they?

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**Felicity:** What about you? Does your church go big on it?

**Sarah:** Our church goes relatively big a thing on it. They have it and I think I've grown to really value it. I think Lockdown taught us that the Tea and Biscuit chat. When we didn't have it for months and months and months, you realized how important it was and how valuable it was to have that kind of lingering around. Time before and after church, and how those conversations kind of help you get into the bigger conversations of what it looks like to encourage each other. So I love the tea and biscuit chatting.

**Felicity:** We're in favor, I agree, I think as well. It's just that that it's thing to do, isn't it? You don't feel like, oh, I haven't got anything to do, I'm going to talk to you, so I'm just going to go. But it's like, oh, no, I can just go and grab a biscuit and that will give me a reason to stick around a bit longer. And they kids like it a lot.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I mean, we had very grumpy kids last week because there were no biscuits. I was like, oh, how are we going to get through this after church bit without a biscuit? It was tough.

**Felicity:** It was tough.

**Sarah:** Anyway. Okay, so we're getting back to the last part of the letter today, which is full. It's full to overflowing with things to talk about, so we'll see how far we get. Shall I read it for us?

**Felicity:** Yes, go for it.

**Sarah:** Okay, so I'm going to be reading chapter five, verses twelve to 28. 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. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive. Encourage the disheartened, help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. 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, do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them all. Hold on to what is good. Reject every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

**Felicity:** Thanks, Sarah. When I first read that, it feels like quite a list. I feel like it's just kind of ticking off a bunch of stuff, which is isn't it?

**Sarah:** It is, isn't it? In the sense that the subheading is final instructions. It is like a list, isn't it?

**Felicity:** It's true, a list of instructions. But when I see a list, then my temptation is to just kind of skim over it a little bit. I feel like one of the questions I've been mulling this week is how do these items on the list relate to what has come before and the letter as a whole?

**Sarah:** And that's where our final tool of the season comes in handy, isn't it? The so what tool? Because actually, without the so, what's the point? What's the point of the whole of the rest of the letter if it's not put into action and if it's not kind of making an inroad on our hearts and then on our lives? And so that's the so what tool, isn't it? It's asking So what? Because of what I know now, because of what I've been told and what I've been shown. What does that actually mean on the ground? What does that look like? And what we have here at the end of the letter is like a massive so what? Because this is real church lived out in the flesh in real life, and he's giving instructions for what it looks like to put the rest of the letter in practice.

**Felicity:** I think, yes, I think that's so true and that's such a good explanation of the so wattle and I think that's a really good way of thinking about what we've got in front of us here. I was really struck by the way in which it relates all the way back to the first few verses of the letter. Really.

**Sarah:** When you talk how'd you say that?

**Felicity:** Well, if you were to flick back with me, you'd see verse three. He's talking to the says, we remember before our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope. And all the way through the lesser, I think we've seen faith, love and hope coming through. And then here, even just in the first few verses, you get it, the love. And I think we have this love, faith, hope in action here as they're called to love one another. I think the so what seems to be so love one another and wait well for Jesus return, look to him. And this kind of the work of faith because of who you are, therefore this is what it's going to look like to be those people. It's kind of all part of that. We're charged to walk in the kingdom of God and this is what it is to be the people of God.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I think yeah, I got similarly, actually when I was thinking about this. So the first basically verses twelve well, I got verses twelve to 15 were kind of the love loving one another. What is loving your neighbor look like in action? I then kind of split 16 to 22, kind of faith. What does faith look like? And then 23 to the end is kind of about the hope and what we're looking forward to and living in light of that. So I kind of split it into three, really, and to see the faith and the love and the hope and should we just take each part of that and just see?

**Felicity:** Let's do it. Let's do it. So that first section, I love the way you've split up. A good use of the structure tool.

**Sarah:** Thank you.

**Felicity:** How do we see love play? That I thought was noticeable to me. I was surprised in a way that he starts talking about the people in charge. Like, I don't feel like we've had a lot about that so far in the letter, but it was a good reminder that actually the people in charge are all part of the body, this church family, that we're in a wider church family. And so therefore, why wouldn't we care for them and hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work? And I think it's just a really helpful reminder as to how we see the people who are pastoring us, who are shepherding us.

**Sarah:** Yeah, big time. And he has modeled that as an all the way through. He has shown what it looks like both to love them and also for them to serve him and love him in return, isn't it? I was really struck like verse 14, I think it's a really powerful verse and it says, we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the

disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. And that just feels like that is a summary of a church family, isn't it? There are those who are idle and disruptive, there's always going to be those who are disheartened, there's always going to be the weak. And with all of those categories, you need to be patient. Patience is kind of the bedrock of how you respond to anyone in any of those three camps. And there will be times when we're probably all of those things. And I think just being able to accept warnings, being receptive to that, being able to accept encouragement when we're feeling disheartened, being able to accept help when we need it, when we're feeling weak, but also being able to the ones who give help and the ones who give encouragement and the ones who are willing to stand up and warn a fellow sister or whatever he's being idle or disruptive. I just think it's a really powerful verse. There's a lot packed into that sentence. But be patient with everyone. That is the epitome of love, isn't it, actually? All of those things coming with love at the heart. That it's.

**Felicity:** Love.

**Sarah:** The love of Jesus you're bringing as you do any of those things.

**Felicity:** Yeah, really helpful. I'm really helpful just to kind of almost break down what that love looks like in those verbs that you were talking about there. Really helpful. Okay, so we get this kind of picture and I love at the end of verse 15 always tries to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. I love the kind of togetherness I think throughout this whole passage we have so much kind of one another ring, which fits very well with what he's been saying all the way through the letter, doesn't it? So helpful to see what that actually looks like.

**Sarah:** Yeah, it's just such a reminder, isn't it? This is done together in community. This is a church thing together. Like what you believe about the gospel impacts what you do on the ground with others. It can't be in isolation, can it? And I think just all these instructions are so other people centered and just a really helpful reminder of that.

**Felicity:** Yeah, absolutely. So then we get onto this, the next section and this idea. Can you just help us to think through why did you label that section in relation to faith?

**Sarah:** Yeah. So I'll go backwards. Verse 19, for example, do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them or hold on to what is good. Reject every kind of evil. That's talking about the Spirit's work. That's talking about the faith that we hold and the Spirit's work in us. That is part of our faith, isn't it? To not quench the spirit. We had that in the chapter four as well, in relation to how they love one another and not rejecting God, who gives you the Holy Spirit. So just rooting that in their faith. And then I kind of feel like the verse 16:17 and 18 is very famous verses, really, but it's kind of the hinge of it all, really. This is the heartbeat of our faith and it's God's will for us that we should rejoice always, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances. And as we do that, I think everything else in this final section kind of can happen more easily, I think.

**Felicity:** Yeah, I think that's right. I think that heart of rejoicing and praying and giving thanks is very God focused, isn't it? Like, we're rejoicing in what the Lord has given us. We're giving thanks for all you can. And in prayer, we're dependent upon Him. So as we it kind of shifts our eyes to look to Him more, which is an act of faith, isn't it, to trust Him in all of that. And I love that, as you say, that this is God's will for you in Christ. It just kind of echoes all the way through. We've had this authoritative this is this is God's gospel. This is what it is to be God's people. This is God's will for you. There's no doubt these instructions paint a picture of what it is to be obedient to God, to be in God's people in that way, which is I find that really encouraging as well as challenging. I think my instinctive thing is to be like, oh, man, what god's telling me to do something. But actually, I think there's actually in that a huge encouragement all the way through thessalonians of this is who I am. I really want to be that person. And he's giving me not only the instructions, but the means by which we can do it.

**Sarah:** Yeah. And I think the temptation is always to think, lord, what's Your will for my life? What's Your will for my life? Really wanting to know the details. He's giving very detailed instruction here for what his will is. It's to give thanks in all circumstances and it's to rejoice continually and to pray continually and gosh, yeah, just take that. And if we were really to live out that command, we would begin to be a lot more thankful for his will because we'd see the impact on our life and on others as we live that out in relation to others. Wouldn't

we rather be fixated on what's the plan for my life kind of thing, which I think I can be tempted to fall into. And then we've got the hope coming through at the end of this extraordinary prayer. Do you want to just kind of share a bit of what struck you about the prayer, Felicity?

**Felicity:** Yeah, I just loved the fact that he ends on a prayer. I mean, this is like, maybe the best moment in the book. I know you're not used to say that about a book, but I feel.

**Sarah:** Like this is your favorite moment.

**Felicity:** Yeah. Okay. So may God himself the God of peace sanctify you. I feel like this list is a picture of a sanctified life. If this is what God desires for us, this is will for us, this is a picture of it. And you get to the end of the list and you're like, okay, that sounds kind of hard. And then you read the prayer and you think, yes, God Himself will sanctify you through and through. So by God's grace and strength, that is the way in which we will live this life described. And I love that you have it's God who sanctifies and it's God who keeps. And we're very much the passive person in that, aren't we? So God is doing it rather than that is exactly what I need to hear because I am definitely someone who reads a list and I'm like, Right, do it. Just get on and do it. And I think prayer really helps me to actually stop, look to the Lord, pray, arrest in Him, and seek to live out this life.

**Sarah:** Yeah, it's amazing, isn't it? It's a really great prayer. It's a really encouraging end because it just reminds us all along of we're waiting for Him. That's the end game, isn't it? We're waiting to be. May your whole spirit, soul and body, all of you, be kept blaming us at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we're looking forward to. And so anything that we're doing up, any of these instructions that we are then seeking to live out, is because of wanting to live out who we already are as those who've been sanctified and made blameless and are continuing on that path until he comes again.

**Felicity:** And that's just exactly what we need, isn't it? And I think through reading first thessalonians then that's been a really big factor all the way through that the more we've thought on and heard about Jesus's return, the more our hope is bolstered in that is built up. And I think that's the thessalonian's angle, isn't it? In many ways, because that's not something we talk about or think about very often. But as we've been in the lesser than we've talked about it and prayed about it and it's been very much on our horizon. And as we have it in view, I think I've begun to see this is the reason for the hope. This is why I do have hope, because I'm waiting on the certain hope of Jesus.

**Sarah:** Jesus's return, that God and he ends on the note of grace. Isn't he the grace that he began the letter with, he ends on that note in verse 28. And again, just seeing that it's all through grace, it's all his gift to us. So anything that we can do to live out this love that we've been shown by the Lord Jesus and modeled by Paul, that's all grace, which is extraordinary, isn't it?

**Felicity:** Brilliant.

**Sarah:** So just kind of briefly to kind of drive this to our hearts a bit more, what is it like to take seriously these commands?

**Felicity:** Well, I think, as I was saying at the start, it's tempting to just kind of skim through a list, isn't it? And it's like Paul's final notes at the end. And I think actually reading slowly, walking slowly through this list, committing them to prayer, that would be a sober minded approach to the list because it finishes in prayer. Why wouldn't I pray these things in for us? Which I find challenging, because that is then dependency first, rather than activism, rather than doing. Yeah, exactly. So I think that's something I've been thinking about a little bit this week, is what does it look like to depend on God in order to do these things? What about you?

**Sarah:** Yeah, I think similarly, just thinking, yeah, what would it look like to take each of these commands and really pray them through, really think about them, consider what that looks like in my location right here, right now, with my church family. What does this look like to encourage the disheartened and to really just spend some time praying and thinking that through. What does this look like to always drive to do what is good for each other? I think, as you say, it's that combination of praying that asking the Lord to kind of reveal insight into how I can best live this out. And also then writing down some ideas and praying those through as well. There's so much here. There's so much here. But I think just a

starter, isn't it, of actually, we need to think this through, we can't just skim over this. This is integral to our witness as Christians on the ground. And that's why it's included and all.

**Felicity:** Together as being it would be so great to talk about this with someone in our local church, wouldn't it? Rather than just us sitting down. But actually yeah, sit down yourself. But maybe it's then sitting with someone over a coffee. How can we together go about big.

**Sarah:** Time you want to pray for us? Listy?

**Felicity:** Yes. Sure. Father, we praise you so much for Your grace. Thank you. That it's you who's doing the sanctifying you who keeps us that you are the one who is faithful, praise you that we see that so much in Jesus. And we pray that as we depend on you, would you enable us to live out this holy life? We pray that we be those who are ready to encourage, ready to help, ready to love, help us to be patient with everyone. Father, would you help us to have our eyes out and looking to others? And in that, would we glorify you more and more? We pray that we might just live out of this by your grace. Amen.

**Sarah:** Amen. So just to remind that we've got our show note questions to discuss these things further. Do pick it up with a friend in your church family and seek to deeply apply what we've been reading today. What is it like to live this out on the ground? Yeah, the questions are there just to help you start those conversations. And we'll be back next week to round up the letter. I know.

**Felicity:** I can't believe it's nearly over. I feel like this is we've been flying through, but good times. Good times. And then one more episode to go. So we will see you next week.

**Sarah:** Yeah. All right. Take care.

**Felicity:** Bye.

**Sarah:** Bye. Bye.

**Felicity:** This episode is sponsored by Crossway.