

# **Lifestyle**

This is taken from 1 Thessalonians 5.12-22:

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over 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, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.

## **1. Respect for leaders**

OK, so how many people have dissed their leaders or pastor, youth pastor etc? Hands up? And why have you/we dissed leaders? Reasons?

The Bible says in 1 Thess 5.12 and also in Hebrews 13.17 say that we have a duty to obey our leaders and do our best to not make life hard for them. This doesn't mean blind obedience but Hebrews says it will make things better for YOU if you obey your leaders and don't make life miserable for them. The benefits go both ways!

## **2. The Team**

Many people know that being part of a team is rewarding. I watched a documentary on 9/11 and watched how the firefighters of New York worked together on the day of and in the aftermath of that terrible day in 2001. I saw men go back to Ground Zero day after day, working night after night, with torn hands and broken hearts. I saw the power and the strength that comes from being in a team, especially in adversity. There was a bond, an unbreakable bond between the men of the FDNY.

The Bible is quite clear that as Christians we are all part of Jesus' body, the church, together.

Game - get a few volunteers and get them in a circle. On each person's forehead place a post-it so they can't see what it says. On each post-it, write a different kind of person involved in church life. For example, we had pastor, youth pastor, deacon, worship leader, flower arranger, organist and other silly ones. The volunteers have to guess what they are, they are not allowed to tell each other directly. Everyone else watches. It's good fun

God wants us to work in a team. Every person is special, individual, created perfectly by God, named, called and given amazing unique gifts. Together we are strong. God doesn't just want individuals but a united church, a bride Jesus can be proud of

### **3. Joy - giving thanks always**

Joy? What is it - the word isn't used much these days? Well, joy means being filled with God's love, happiness, peace etc. It's the kind of person who glows, their face shining brightly, reflecting Jesus. They are full of the joy that only comes from holiness, obedience, spending time with God - the power of the Holy Spirit.

'The joy of the Lord is my strength' said Nehemiah (in Nehemiah 8.10). Joy in God gives you strength. Joy, true joy, can only come from God. Otherwise it's a temporary, human emotion. It's not being happy, but being truly satisfied with who you are in God, being thankful and being filled with God's presence. Many of us, like me, have got a long way to go!

How can we do this? Well, Philippians 4.4 gives us one hint. It is an attitude. A choice. It's something we have to work on. It's the kind of thing that says, I may have been knocked down but because of God, I'm going to get back up, thanking God for being knocked down, and be stronger and more determined, full of God.

We can pray daily, 'God, I choose the joy of the Lord today, I ask you to fill me with the joy of the Spirit'

### **4. Don't hold back the Spirit**

One year when we went to Soul Survivor (UK Christian youth festival) it was, as usual, a fantastic time. However, during the ministry time at the end of the evening sessions, we felt it got a bit hyped and many of our young people were freaked out, crying because they were being carried in a tide of emotionalism. Some churches and young people left, perhaps not understanding what was going on. Not sure anyone knew if it was the Holy Spirit or emotionalism. Today I wouldn't have worried but we were (at the time) from an evangelical church where these kinds of things didn't happen and weren't talked about. Looking back, I wonder if we were guilty of holding back the Spirit? Did we resist because of our own issues, history and theology? Or were we right to do what we did? I think we probably did. Today people are thankfully more open to the Holy Spirit. But we also need to check our spirits - does what is happening line up with Biblical principles and do we feel a 'check' in our spirits? If we do, is it because what is happening is not of God - or is it because we feel uncomfortable? But the Holy Spirit does make us feel uncomfortable! And Derek Prince (famous old preacher) used to say if the Bible doesn't shock you, you've not properly read the Bible!

A few years ago, RT Kendall (Bible teacher) was the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London. One time he brought to the church a famous prophet/healer/evangelist with a bit of a dodgy reputation. As a result, members of RT's church actually left. However, RT's wife was healed by this man's touch from God as were others. RT felt vindicated in bringing him to the church. If he hadn't, the Spirit wouldn't have moved as He did

Ephesians 4.30 tells us not to grieve the Spirit - don't do things, say or think things that are against the nature of the Spirit. What is the nature of the Spirit? Read Galatians 5.22-23 and Philippians 4.8-9 for some clues

Let's be careful not to disrespect things we ourselves don't like. I don't like traditional church stuff, I find it boring and irrelevant to most people in the UK today. However, I have to realise that many Christians and others find it very helpful. I can resist God's Spirit by my personal preferences. As a leader it's a big issue. Other ways we can resist the Spirit is by telling God how he can work. 'People need to be your friend before they can be saved.' Really? It may well help very often but it's no way exclusively true. Check your attitudes today.

## **5. Seek prophecy**

1 Corinthians 14.1 says, 'You should seek after love, and you should want to have spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.' So seeking prophecy is a Biblical command. Prophecy is important, very important.

Prophecy is a difficult area. Often we can think something is from God and yet it is only a desire of our heart. We need to be able to distinguish what is from God and what is not. However, we must not be afraid to speak up and try to prophesy. It takes courage but God is waiting to give good things to build up his Kingdom. We need to learn, under God's instruction, how to handle these gifts.

What is prophecy? A good definition is prophecy is God speaking through men or women to reveal his heart in a given situation, or a general situation. Prophecy is hearing from God, telling people what God has said and discerning what it means, what God wants, what God is saying. It is there to build up people, the church, to warn, instruct, guide and teach us. It is there to envision us. Without prophecy, vision, we are not brought forward to fulfill all God wants from us

Maybe take time out now to listen to God, to see if he wants to say anything. Share it in a small group. Don't be afraid to practice! Yep, practice. I once was part of a group that did this - encouraged to seek God and then give pictures, words, prophecies about someone in the group unknown to us. When we spoke the words, to a person these words all spoke correctly into the person's life it was amazing.

Mike Pilavachi of Soul Survivor tells a story of practicing prophecy. He was very nervous and felt very unspiritual. He decided he would be more holy before the day so he could hear from God clearly. In fact, he forgot about the day which came around suddenly. On the day, in the room, in front of a couple, he listened as his friend who had a gift of prophecy gave words to the couple.

Then came Mike's turn. However, the only thing he could hear or see in his head was Abba singing 'Dancing Queen'. He hoped the ground would swallow him up or that Jesus would return. Neither happened so he duly gave his 'word'. 'In the words of Abba, you can dance, you can dance, having the time of your lives.' There was a silence and then giggles from the couple. 'Do you want to know why we're laughing?' asked the woman. Mike, nervously agreed. 'Well, I started running a dance class at church a couple of weeks ago and I was wondering whether I should carry on with it' came the reply.

You see, God has got the greatest sense of humour! And he's bang on, every time!

## **6. Test Prophecy**

Testing prophecy is important. If we don't measure what someone says against God's Word or against basic principles of Christianity we can be fooled by people deliberately or mistakenly deceiving us, often out of good motives!

A Scottish pastor lost his 17 year-old daughter to her condition linked to her down-syndrome. Many people had prophesied over her that she would be healed. 'She will be healed by God' some said, others said, 'she won't die.' However, she did die, aged just 17. The pastor went to speak to a friend, wondering whether to pack in the ministry. Not because he was discouraged but because he wondered if he had done something wrong. His friend wisely took him aside and said, 'Don't give up. It's not God who has failed you, it's people's prophecies that have failed you. They were wrong, not you, not God.'

**Key Point** - Remember that God never fails us, even when we don't understand.

This links to an experience I had when a visiting American 'prophet' visited my city. It was a great, insightful talk but suddenly at the end it turned into a kind of performance with an alleged 'prophecy' that really deeply disturbed me and troubled my spirit to the core. It was so not of God. To be honest I felt like smacking him one (in love obviously)! Prophecy must be subject to testing. Don't just accept it. If something feels wrong, don't accept it and speak out loud your rejection of the words.

So let's test prophecy. If it or the principle isn't in the Bible, it isn't from God (period). If it's leading down a path that feels wrong to the leaders it can be wrong. If it opposed to other prophecies, combined with what's in people's hearts and the way God has been leading, it can also be wrong. Seek God, always.

## **7. Do what is good**

Tony Campolo, the famous US speaker and evangelist tells a story of when he went to Honolulu. While there he ended up in a cafe at 3.30am in the morning. Suddenly he was surrounded by woman, prostitutes. Listening to their conversation he heard that one of them had a birthday the next day. She had never had a birthday party in her life. After the women left, Tony agreed with the cafe owner that the next morning they would throw a birthday party for this woman. Everyone was there before she arrived. She walked in, more shocked than anyone he had ever seen. She had a cake and decorations and everything. She was bowled over, big time. She wanted to take the cake home so she did. There was a silence in the cafe so Tony suggested they all prayed, which they duly did!! The cafe owner was a bit annoyed about this and said, 'You didn't tell me you were religious. What kind of church do you belong to?' Tony replied, 'I belong to the kind of church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3.30am in the morning.' 'No way man' said the owner, 'there's no church like that, I'd belong to it if there was.'

What a challenge. Not just to reach out to prostitutes but to do good, whenever and however we can, being open to the creative and true mind of God.