

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

STUDY FIVE

What Does It Mean to “Really Live”?

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

Unfortunately, humanity rarely turns to God for His thoughts on the matter of what it means to “really live,” even though He is our Maker.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF a local newscaster stopped random people crisscrossing a busy street in your hometown and asked them the question, “Would you like to *really live*,” he or she would receive a resounding yes! If the reporter followed up with the question, “What does it mean to *really live*?” the responses would probably follow similar lines.

Some would say that “really living” means making lots of money so they can retire early and enjoy the good life, swinging lazily in a hammock of comfort and ease. Others would say that “really living” means good health, fitness, and vibrancy—looking young and cruising the fast lane of thrills and adventure.

For others, “really living” is about educational pedigree—earned degrees, academic standing, and peer recognition. Accomplishment, advancement, authority. These are marks of “really living” for these people.

But what if we asked God how we should really live? After all, He made us, so it makes sense that He knows what makes us tick. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, the apostle Paul—who was well-acquainted with the vain pursuit of “life” as a former Pharisee—outlines the secrets of what it means to “really live” from God’s perspective. It’s one you can trust!



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

In our pursuit of authentic living, we sometimes forget to seek our Creator for answers and instead turn to the idols of money, fame, pleasure, and power to bring us happiness. Reflect on *Psalm 115:4–8*, and then record your prayer of trust in God alone as your source of life.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When Paul penned 1 Thessalonians, he was suffering ill health, hunted by evil-doers, and uncertain about his future. But—he *really lived*. We can see his inner fountain overflowing in his exuberant response to Timothy’s positive report about the Thessalonians: “for now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 3:8 NIV). Let’s peer into Paul’s soul and find out God’s idea of what real living means.



Observation: This Is Why We Really Live!

Using your *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study skills of observation, carefully read *1 Thessalonians 3:9–13*.¹ Let’s find four clues in this passage that unveil the components of real living.

Joyful in Gratitude—1 Thessalonians 3:9

Satan’s obstacles “prevented” Paul from traveling (1 Thessalonians 2:18) and “troubles and suffering” plagued him (3:7), and yet, despite the opposition and distress, Paul was able to smile. What sparked his joy in 1 Thessalonians 3:9? Why do you think this attitude always goes hand-in-hand with joy?

I don’t mean that every day is full of grins and silly giggles. That’s not joy. Joy is a deep sense of happiness with life. God is in me. God’s on the throne. God’s moving me in His direction. There’s no better way to live. That’s really living.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Earnest in Prayer—1 Thessalonians 3:10

For Jews, sunset signaled a new day, not sunrise. So, when Paul wrote, “Night and day we pray,” he implied that he communed with the Father throughout the day, from beginning to end (1 Thessalonians 3:10). What two prayer requests were on Paul’s heart, according to 1 Thessalonians 3:10? How does prayer help us really live?

Could it be that we don’t really live because we carry the burdens that only God was meant to handle? Could it be that part of the reason life isn’t as happy and delightful is because we have taken responsibility for things that are not ours to handle? That’s why we earnestly pray. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Abounding in Love—1 Thessalonians 3:11–12

Paul didn’t just talk about prayer in his letters; he often prayed as he wrote! Read Paul’s pastoral prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:11–12 and record what you observe about the next key to real living. What did Paul pray for in addition to reuniting with the new believers?

What does his prayer to “God our Father and our Lord Jesus” indicate about the inner working of the Godhead? Who is the source of our love for one another? How does He make love “grow and overflow”?

Paul’s great concern for the Thessalonian believers was that they would realize there’s a connecting link between the living God and their love. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Established in Holiness—1 Thessalonians 3:13

The first three keys to real living build toward and result in the fourth. All that Paul has written culminates in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. What was the outcome of the life God intended for us, according to Paul? What makes this the true meaning of the “good life”?

You want to really live? Be established in holiness. Holiness before people? No. People have reduced the standard of God so that anything goes. If it feels good, do it. My standard is to be as holy as God is holy. The only way of reaching that is through the person and victory of Jesus Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Paul’s Ministry to New Believers

Paul prayed that he could return to the church in Thessalonica, in part, to “fill the gaps in [their] faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:10). The Greek word translated, “fill the gaps” or “complete” (3:10 NASB), is rich with meaning.

Review the Greek term *katartizo* in Mounce’s Greek dictionary at billmounce.com. And then, do a brief word study and look up the following verses that also contain this Greek word. Write down the context and meaning of the word as it appears.

Verses	Context and Meaning of <i>Katartizo</i>
<i>Matthew 4:21</i> repairing, mending	
<i>Luke 6:40</i> fully trained	
<i>Hebrews 13:20–21</i> equip	

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Based on your word study, draw some conclusions about Paul’s purpose for returning to the Thessalonian church. What did Paul mean when he said he wanted to “fill the gaps in your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:10)?

How can you follow Paul’s example as you mentor new believers? What principle comes to you as a guideline?

We shoot for the horizontal, forgetting the vertical. We’re impressed with the natural, not the supernatural. We like quantity rather than quality. All of that is temporal goods, as opposed to eternal stuff. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Scriptural Ingredients for Really Living

Paul’s spiritual training for the Thessalonian believers would have included these keys to real living: joyful gratitude, prayer, love, and holiness. We might think of these as ingredients in a recipe. In the following chart, read each “ingredient” and Scripture passage and then record the “tasteful outcome” from God’s Word.

Ingredient	Tasteful Outcome
Joyful in Gratitude <i>Psalm 103:1–2</i>	
Earnest in Prayer <i>Colossians 4:2–4</i>	
Abounding in Love <i>1 Corinthians 13:4–8</i>	
Established in Holiness <i>1 Peter 1:13–16</i>	

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Paul is looking ahead to the ultimate day when we’re with Jesus. He sees it as a finished, completed fact. But it’s not so right now. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Growing Toward Real Living

Left to ourselves, without seeking God’s direction and the Holy Spirit’s power, we naturally substitute the artificial for the authentic. Mentally, we substitute knowledge for wisdom. Emotionally, we substitute feelings for facts. Worse yet, spiritually, we substitute the temporal for the eternal. These substitutes cannot nourish us like the healthy ingredients in God’s recipe for real living.

Where do you see the most progress in your attempt to really live? Joyful in gratitude? Earnest in prayer? Abounding in love? Established in holiness?

Where do you see some gaps that need filling? Who can assist you with this, and what practical steps do you wish to take?

The word *love* is used so frequently and in so many contexts. Perhaps an acrostic incorporating the letters of the word may more clearly identify love’s components. For each letter below, record what you believe each word contributes to expressing love.

L—Listen: _____

O—Overlook: _____

V—Value: _____

E—Express: _____

Imagine how loving others in this way will enrich your life! Add to that grateful joy, close communion with God in prayer, holiness . . . and you’ll be living as God made you to live! Mentally, you become wiser. Emotionally, you become stronger. Spiritually, you become purer. You don’t need more artificial ingredients in your food, and you certainly don’t need them in your soul. Real food is what you need . . . food for real living.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Father, for loving me. Thank You for telling me the truth. Thank You for the joy that accompanies life with God, for the privilege of earnest prayer, for the blessings that accompany the child of God in everyday living. May I be established in holiness. May I be a person who walks in dependence upon You. I pray through Jesus Christ. 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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