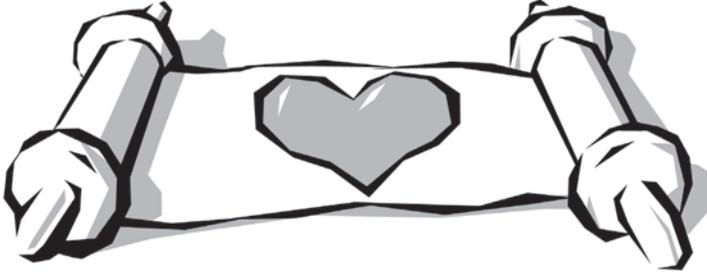


# The Apostolic Example

## (1 Thess. 2:1–12)



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### SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Thess. 2:1–12, Acts 16, Deut. 10:16, Ps. 51:1–10, 2 Cor. 8:1–5, Luke 11:11–13.*

**Memory Text:** “But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts” (*1 Thessalonians 2:4, ESV*).

**Key Thought:** By revealing what the true motive in ministry must be, Paul can help us all to examine our hearts and lives in light of the gospel.

This week's lesson marks a major transition from the arguments of the first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul moves from a focus on the church (*1 Thess. 1:2–10*) to a focus on the apostles and their experience in Thessalonica (*2:1–12*). In the previous chapter Paul gives thanks to God because the believers in Thessalonica modeled their lives on Paul and, in turn, became models of faithfulness themselves. Now, in *1 Thessalonians 2:1–12*, Paul probes more deeply into the kind of life that enables the apostles to function as role models.

While there are many possible motivations for teaching, preaching, and service, Paul puts his finger on the one that matters most: ministry that will be pleasing to God. Paul was less concerned with growing the church in numbers than with its growing, through God's grace, in the right spiritual principles.

In this lesson we glimpse Paul's innermost life. Paul bares his soul in a way that challenges us to align our own spiritual hopes, dreams, and motivations so that we will please God and have the right influence on others.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 4.*

## Boldness in Suffering (1 Thess. 2:1, 2)

**Read** 1 Thessalonians 2:1, 2 in light of Acts 16. What connection does Paul draw between his earlier ministry in Philippi and his ministry in Thessalonica?

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First Thessalonians 2:1 picks up on the themes of the first chapter. The “you yourselves know” (*NKJV*) of this verse recalls the same language in 1 Thessalonians 1:5. And Paul’s reference to “coming” or gaining “entrance” with the church recalls 1 Thessalonians 1:9. So, Paul is continuing the themes that he raised in the opening chapter of the letter. The end of the previous chapter was concerned with what “everybody” knew about the Thessalonians. In this chapter he discusses what the readers know about the apostles and their commitment to the faith.

Paul recalls how he and Silas were shamefully treated in Philippi on account of preaching the gospel. On the long road from Philippi to Thessalonica, every step was a painful reminder of that treatment. No doubt they bore outward signs of their pain, even upon arriving in Thessalonica. It would have been easy at that point for the apostles to take a less direct approach to evangelism in the new city. After all that they had just been through, who would have blamed them?

But the Thessalonians proved eager and open for the truth. Reality said, “Don’t ever preach the gospel again.” But in the midst of their pain and suffering, God was saying to Paul and Silas: Be bold. Be strong. So, they “began to be bold” (*1 Thess. 2:2, author’s translation*) in spite of the likelihood that persecution would arise again. There was a strong and visible contrast between their human condition (and all the frailties that come with it) and their empowerment by God.

In the end, the Lord used these outward circumstances to His glory. The visible wounds of the preachers provided evidence of two things to the Thessalonians. First, the gospel they preached truly came from their personal conviction. They were not doing it for personal advantage (*see 1 Thess. 2:3–6*). Second, it was clear to the hearers that God was with Paul and Silas in a mighty way. The gospel that they preached was not just an intellectual construct; it was accompanied by the living presence of the Lord as revealed in the lives of the apostles (*see vs. 13*).

**What would you point to as evidence that God has changed your life? How is this evidence visible to others? Or is it visible at all?**

## The Character of the Apostles (1 Thess. 2:3)

**Read** 1 Thessalonians 2:3. What key point is Paul making there about motives?

It was widely known in the ancient world that there were three keys of persuading people to change their ideas or practices. People judge the power of an argument on the character of the speaker (in Greek: *ethos*), the quality or logic of the argument itself (*logos*), and the power of the speaker's appeal to the listener's emotions or self-interest (*pathos*). In 1 Thessalonians 2:3–6 Paul focuses on the character of the apostles as a key element of the preaching that led to radical changes in the Thessalonians.

In these verses, Paul draws a contrast between himself and the popular philosophers, whose preaching was often motivated by personal benefit (see lesson 3). Paul uses three words in verse 3 to describe possible bad motivations for preaching or ministry.

The first word is *error*, an intellectual mistake. A preacher may be excited about an idea that is simply wrong. He or she may be perfectly sincere but self-deceived. They think they are doing good for others but are motivated by false ideas.

The second word is *uncleanness*, or *impurity*. People are attracted to individuals who are widely known for their power, ideas, or performance. Some public figures can be motivated by the sexual opportunities that come with fame or notoriety.

The third word is best translated as *deception*, or *trickery*. In this case the speaker is aware that the ideas being presented are wrong but is consciously trying to mislead people in order to benefit himself.

Paul and Silas were not motivated by any of these. If they had been, their experience in Philippi would probably have made them quit preaching. The boldness that they exhibited in Thessalonica was made possible only by the power of God working through them. The power that the gospel had in Thessalonica (see 1 Thess. 1:5) was in part due to the character of the apostles, which shone through in their presentations. Logical arguments and emotional appeals were not enough. Their characters were in accordance with their claims. Such authenticity has tremendous power in today's world, as it did in ancient times.

**Think through your own motives for all that you do. How pure are they, how free are they of error, deceit, and impurity? If they are not what they should be, how can you change for the better? See also Deut. 10:16, Phil. 4:13, Ps. 51:1–10.**

## Pleasing God (1 Thess. 2:4–6)

**Read** 1 Thessalonians 2:4–6. Describe the contrast between Paul’s motivation for ministry and the worldly alternatives he mentions. Why is it not always so easy to see the differences; that is, how can people deceive themselves regarding the purity of their own motives? Why is this so easy to do?

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The word often translated as “approved” (*1 Thess. 2:4*) reflects the idea of testing or examination. The apostles allowed God to test the integrity of their lives and intentions. The purpose of that testing was to make sure that the gospel they shared would not be distorted by a contrast between what they preached and how they lived.

The popular philosophers of the day wrote about the importance of self-examination. If you want to make a difference in the world, they taught, you need to examine constantly your motives and intentions. Paul takes this idea one step further. He taught that in addition to self-examination, he was examined by God. God verified that what Paul preached was consistent with his inner life. In the ultimate sense, God is the only one worth pleasing.

Human beings need a sense of worth in order to function. We often seek this worth by accumulating possessions, by achievements, or through the positive opinions that others express about us. But all these sources of self-worth are fragile and so temporary. Genuine and lasting self-worth is found only through the gospel. When we fully grasp that Christ died for us, we begin to experience a sense of worth that nothing in this world can shake.

**What** does 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 6 add to the three motivations listed in verse 3?

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The concept of flattery picks up on the theme of pleasing people, a poor basis for evangelism. Paul is not motivated by what other people think of him. He also rules out another worldly motivation for ministry: money. People who have been blessed by someone’s ministry are usually eager to give money to that ministry or to buy its products. This can tempt God’s workers to lose their focus on the only motivation that really matters, pleasing God.

**What in your life pleases God, and why? What doesn’t, and why not?**

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## Caring Deeply (1 Thess. 2:7, 8)

**In 1** Thessalonians 2:4, Paul’s primary motivation for ministry is to please God. What additional motivation does Paul bring up in the verses that follow? See 1 Thess. 2:6–8.

In today’s world, money, sex, and power are often considered the primary motivations for human behavior, at least for those consumed by self-interest. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3–6, Paul uses a number of different words to rule out similar motivations in relation to his ministry. Greed, immorality, deception, and flattery have no place in Christian life and ministry. The apostles were motivated primarily by the desire to please God in all that they did.

In verse 6 Paul notes that the apostles could have been a burden to the Thessalonians, or literally could have “thrown their weight around.” As apostles and teachers they could have demanded recognition of their status. They could have expected to receive monetary favors and to be treated with special honor. But in Thessalonica Paul declined anything that could have compromised his motives or that could have put a stumbling block in the way of the new converts.

While Paul’s primary motivation was to please God, in verses 7 and 8 he expresses an additional motivation—his great affection for the Thessalonians themselves. Verse 8 uses the language of emotional warmth. Preaching the gospel was much more than a duty for Paul; he gave his heart, even his whole self, to the people.

**How** did the churches of Macedonia, of which Thessalonica was a part, respond to the tenderness of the apostles? See 2 Cor. 8:1–5. What does this teach us about the importance of character in the lives of those who witness to others?

In Monday’s lesson we mentioned the three ancient keys to persuasion: the character of the speaker (*ethos*), the logic of the argument (*logos*), and the appeal to emotion or self-interest (*pathos*). In verses 4–6 Paul emphasized the character of the apostles as being a reason to follow them. In verses 7 and 8 we see an appeal to *pathos*, the emotional bond that developed between the apostles and the Thessalonians. The gospel is at its most powerful when it touches the heart.

**Think about the character of someone who influenced you in a positive way spiritually. What was it in particular that touched you? How can you learn to emulate the same traits?**

## To Not Be a Burden (1 Thess. 2:9–12)

**While** Paul was in Thessalonica, what other things did he do in addition to preaching the gospel, and why? See *1 Thess. 2:9, 10*.

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The idea that Paul was working “night and day” would be a huge exaggeration if taken literally. The Greek, however, expresses a qualitative idea rather than the actual amount of time spent. In other words, Paul was saying that he worked beyond the call of duty in order not to burden them; Paul did not want anything to stand in the way of his witness to them.

In addition, he was very careful to behave in such a way as not to cause offense, either before God or before others (see *1 Thess. 2:10, Luke 2:52*). Paul and the apostles sought to be “blameless” in their relationships so that the gospel would become the central focus of attention.

**What** analogy did Paul use in 1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12 to describe his treatment of the Thessalonians? See also *Luke 11:11–13*. What does that analogy teach?

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The good father provides boundaries and encouragement, as well as love. He adapts his nurture and discipline to the unique character and emotional condition of each child. Depending on the child and the situation, the father may offer encouragement, a stern lecture, or disciplinary punishment.

There is a certain tension in Paul’s missionary approach. On the one hand, he always sought to adapt his approach to the unique character and situation of the people; on the other, he was very concerned about authenticity, that the outward and inward be one and the same. How can one be authentic and genuine and yet be “all things to all people”?

The key is the love Paul had for his converts. He did all he could to model authenticity for them; yet, he realized that there were things that they were not ready to handle (see also *John 16:12*). So, he worked with his hands and adapted his instruction, all in order to avoid putting unnecessary barriers in the way of people’s acceptance of the gospel. A powerful lesson in self-sacrifice for sure.

**Further Study:** “No matter how high the profession, he whose heart is not filled with love for God and his fellow men is not a true disciple of Christ. . . . He might display great liberality; but should he, from some other motive than genuine love, bestow all his goods to feed the poor, the act would not commend him to the favor of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 318, 319.

“While Paul was careful to set before his converts the plain teaching of Scripture regarding the proper support of the work of God, . . . at various times during his ministry in the great centers of civilization, he wrought at a handicraft for his own maintenance. . . .

“It is at Thessalonica that we first read of Paul’s working with his hands in self-supporting labor while preaching the word [1 *Thess.* 2:6, 9; 2 *Thess.* 3:8, 9]. . . .

“But Paul did not regard as lost the time thus spent. . . . He gave his fellow workers instruction in spiritual things, and he also set an example of industry and thoroughness. He was a quick, skillful worker, diligent in business, ‘fervent in spirit, serving the Lord’ (Rom. 12:11).”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 234–236.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Think about a painful time that you have endured (physically, spiritually, emotionally, or some mixture of them all). In practical terms, how does someone find joy or courage in the midst of such suffering? Why is finding that joy and courage so much easier said than done?
- ❷ Think about someone whose life clearly did not reflect his or her claims to be a Christian. How did that person impact your own walk with the Lord?
- ❸ What are the pitfalls in becoming emotionally attached to people with whom you are sharing the gospel? How does one set appropriate boundaries for the relationships that develop whenever you work closely with other people?

**Summary:** In this passage Paul opened his heart to reveal the truest motives for ministry. The ultimate motive is to please God, whether or not those to whom we minister are pleased. Motivations of money, sex, and power have no place in a heart determined to please God. The next most important motive for ministry is heartfelt love for the lost. Both of these motives are clearly expressed in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12.

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Thessalonians 2:1–12*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Remember that one’s witness for Christ is most effective when it is rooted in the motivation to please God and to love others.

**Feel:** Desire to care more genuinely about others and to please God in all that he or she does.

**Do:** Evaluate the motivating forces in his or her Christian experience.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: Character Matters

**A** Consider the qualifications that Paul lists for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1–13. Why is character so important for the Christian life?

**B** What motivations does the apostle Paul identify in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–6 as unbecoming for a Christian? What makes these motivations so damaging?

### II. Feel: Called to Integrity

**A** What “character scandals” have you witnessed in the church? What motivations led to these scandals? And what impact have they had on your church, your community, or on you specifically?

**B** Role models are important. Unfortunately, many of the role models in society today undermine the things that God values most. Paul was a positive role model for the Thessalonians (*1 Thess. 1:5, 6; 2:10*). Who are role models for God today? What type of role model are you in your church, place of work, or family?

### III. Do: Evaluating Our Motives

**A** Cherishing the wrong motives can easily undermine character and harm the cause of Christ. What can we do in order to make sure our motives are pure?

**B** Memorize Micah 6:8 and ask God to make it true in your life.

► **Summary:** A genuine desire to please God and to love others is the only sufficient motivation for living a life that will truly be an effective witness for Christ.

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** **The cause of Christ is best served when we are motivated by a desire to please God in all that we do, and we are willing to place the needs of others genuinely before our own.**

Arguably the greatest threat the Christian church has faced in recent decades has not come from outside the church but from the ever-growing list of scandals that continue to rock the church from within. In fact, sadly enough, an Internet search of the phrase “church scandals” easily produces millions of results. While each scandal has a different name, face, and denomination attached to it, they all stem from one of three sinful motivations for ministry: the desire for money, power, or sex.

The damage of these scandals to the cause of Christ is staggering. We live in a generation in which the church has largely lost its moral authority. Instead of being a voice of restraint against moral depravity, skeptics are quick to point out that the church is often part of the problem. After each scandal, more people begin to wonder how the message of Christianity can be true if it does not appear to make a difference in the lives of those who proclaim it.

It would be easy to blame this problem on the clergy whose names highlight these scandals, but that does not really solve anything. Instead of blaming anyone, we need to realize that, except for the grace of God, any of us could fall to similar temptations—after all, we are all humans. The far better course of action is to heed the warning that the apostle Paul gave to the Thessalonians two thousand years ago about the dangers of letting our motivation for serving Him be overcome by any temptation to satisfy our own desires.

**Consider This:** What can we do to be part of the solution to the moral scandals that have plagued the church rather than be part of the scandal ourselves?

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

## Bible Commentary

**I. Paul’s Motives** (*Review 1 Thessalonians 2:1–8 with the class.*)

In the same way that people today are often skeptical about television evangelists who seem more interested in money and fame than they are in helping the needy, people in the ancient world were also skeptical of traveling philosophers and public orators, and rightly so. For more often than not, the itinerant “preachers” of Paul’s time were nothing more than charlatans pursuing fame and fortune.

We get a fascinating picture of the type of religious con artists present in Paul’s day when we look at the life of a man named Alexander of Abonoteichus. According to Lucian of Samosata, Alexander was a charlatan par excellence. During the second century, Alexander founded a widely popular cult centered around a snake god called Glycon, who supposedly had a human head with blond hair. People from far and wide, including the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, came to hear (and pay for) the oracles of Glycon as interpreted by Alexander. In one year alone, Alexander received 80,000 drachma (a drachma was roughly the equivalent of a day’s pay). It was quite the racket. Lucian’s account and images of Glycon can be found by searching the Internet for the phrase “Lucian of Samosata: Alexander the False Prophet.”

To avoid being associated with religious frauds like Alexander, Paul makes a bold defense of his ministry in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12. His words make it clear that some people were suspicious, not only of his teachings but even of the motives behind his ministry. In response to such charges, Paul argues that his ministry was not based on error (2:3), impure motives (2:3), trickery (2:3), or greed (2:5)—the very things that certainly were associated with the cult of Glycon.

Aspects of three of the words Paul mentions are worth noting. First, Paul’s use of the word *impurity* probably has sexual connotations attached to it. It is used with this sense in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, and Paul often pairs it with sexual immorality elsewhere (see 2 Cor. 12:21, Gal. 5:19). This may suggest that some pagans viewed with suspicion Paul’s association with the prominent women in Thessalonica who converted to Christianity (Acts 17:4). Second, the word Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 2:3 for “deceive” (*ESV*) or “deceit” (*NKJV*) comes from a word that describes the bait used to catch a fish. It refers to any activity that seeks to take advantage of someone unaware. Last of all, while the word *greed* (2:5, *ESV*) has some reference to the desire for financial gain, it is actually a much broader term. It comes from the combination of two Greek words: the words *to have* and *more*. Thus, it points to the general human desire for self-indulgence in all phases of our lives.

**Consider This:** In an age of traveling charlatans, why was it so important for Paul to defend his true motives for ministry? What, if any, implications does this have for us today?

## II. Paul's Method (Review 1 Thessalonians 2:9–12 with the class.)

Anyone can claim that his or her motives are upright. Whether it is actually true or not is a separate issue altogether. Paul's lifestyle and ministry, however, provided ample evidence of the veracity of his claims.

Unlike other traveling teachers who depended upon the financial support of their audience, Paul's practice was to earn his own living by working with his hands. The reason for this practice was not that Paul felt ministers should not be paid for their services. In his other letters, he clearly states that they should receive financial support (*1 Tim. 5:17, 18*). But when it came to his own ministry, Paul chose not to ask for money so that no one might accuse him of simply seeking financial gain.

How, then, did Paul support himself in Thessalonica? Being a tentmaker by trade (*Acts 18:3, 20:34*), Paul would have earned his keep by spending his days cutting, tooling, and stitching leather in either his own shop or that of a fellow artisan. While leatherworking was not easy work, Paul's "day job" did provide him with the opportunity to meet and talk with people who needed his services. His track record as an upright and honest businessman would have certainly also enhanced his credibility in the community. Finally, after a long day of physical labor and during the Sabbath hours, Paul would turn his attention to his other job, the one he liked best—the privilege of preaching and teaching the gospel to those who were interested.

Why did Paul do all this? He "did it because he intended the new Christians to know that he was there for them like a father for his children. Fathers don't charge their children for bringing them up, for raising them to be the people they ought to be.

"That was what Paul's work was about."—Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 98.

**Consider This:** Cynics often say that churches are interested only in money. What might we learn from Paul's method of supporting his own ministry that would oppose such cynicism?

### ► **STEP 3**—Apply

#### Thought Questions:

- 1 In contrast with the charge of being a religious charlatan, what two metaphors does Paul use to describe himself in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 and 11? What

do these figures reveal about his ministry and motives?

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**2** The story of the prophet Balaam in the Old Testament (*Numbers 22*) and Simon the magician in the New Testament (*Acts 8*) contain the story of two men who lost sight of the real motivation for ministry. How did these men lose their way? What lessons can we learn from them?

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### Application Questions:

**1** The stories of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon tell the experiences of two men who were faithful to God when many others were not. What can we learn from these men that will help us in our struggle against the temptations of sex, power, and money?

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**2** No one ever wakes up and decides on a whim to ruin his or her life. Every public scandal in the church began with someone taking small steps toward compromise and sin. What can we do to make sure we don't go down that same path?

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**3** While the Bible records stories of people whose integrity never seemed to waver, it also tells of men and women who made grave mistakes but repented. Which of the latter stories offers you the most hope for your own experience, and why?

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## ► STEP 4—Create

**Activity:** End this week's lesson study by reminding class members that no one is invincible. We all have our own trials and temptations. Even the most godly men and women we know struggle against sin—that is what the Bible teaches. We all need encouragement and prayer.

If possible, break the class up into small groups of two or three people for prayer. Encourage group members to share a specific prayer request. In addition, have each group pray for the spiritual leaders of their church, asking that God will keep them from losing sight of the high purpose of their calling and that He will help them to be of unwavering integrity.