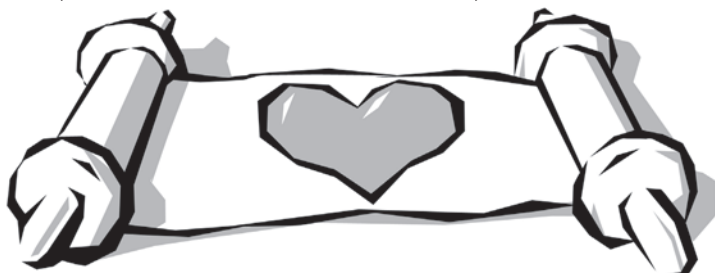


The Apostolic Example (1 Thess. 2:1–12)



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 is 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?

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. In the end of the previous chapter, Paul is concerned with what “everybody” knows 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*, or an intellectual mistake. That is to say, a preacher may be excited about an idea that is simply wrong. He or she may be perfectly sincere but self-deceived. He thinks he is doing good for others but is motivated by false ideas.

The second word is *uncleanness*, or *impurity*. It refers to the fact that people are attracted to individuals who are widely known for their power, ideas, or performance. In addition, 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. So, logical arguments and emotional appeals were not enough. Their characters were in accordance with their claims. Such authenticity had tremendous power in ancient times, just as it does today.

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 them 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?

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 constantly examine your motives and intentions. Paul took this idea one step further. He taught that in addition to self-examination, he was examined by God. This meant that God verified that what Paul preached was consistent with his inner life. Paul’s point was that, 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?

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?

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 emphasizes 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.*

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?*

The good father provides boundaries and encouragement, as well as love. He adapts his nurturing 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:

- 1 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?
- 2 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?
- 3 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 Lost Boy

Du and Zho are a Global Mission pioneer couple who are planting a church in a city in China. They sell products from door to door in order to meet people and make friends for Christ. They focus on helping people with special needs such as the sick, the elderly, and the needy. Then they introduce their new friends to their Savior.

Most of the people living in the region worship idols, so Du and Zho visit the temples to meet people as well. They search for people who look lonely or sad and offer their sympathy and friendship. If the people are willing, the couple prays for their special needs. Thus, they have made many friends with whom they share God's love and some literature introducing their friends to God.

One day as Du and Zho were walking along a road, they saw a teenage boy. He looked dirty and lost and troubled, so they stopped to talk to him. Du and Zho realized that the boy had mental problems and couldn't tell them where he lived. It was winter and bitterly cold; the boy's hands appeared to have been damaged by frostbite.

Du and Zho asked the boy to come to their home. They gave him a bath, provided him with clean clothes, and fed him a simple, warm meal. Again they asked him where he lived. But the boy couldn't tell them.

Du and Zho cared for the boy in their home while they contacted the police and a local television station for help in finding his family. Two weeks later the police called to tell them that they had located the boy's family some 200 miles away from where Du and Zho had found him.

The couple took the boy back to his parents, who were grateful to have their lost son home again. When the family realized that Du and Zho were Christians, they invited the couple to stay with them and tell them about God. Du contacted the local elder at a nearby Seventh-day Adventist church and asked him to visit the family.

Du and Zho returned home to continue their work. A few months later they learned that the lost boy's family had found Christ as their Lord and had joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Our mission offerings support the work of Global Mission around the world.

Du and Zho are two of 60 lay workers who help a single pastor oversee 46 churches and 4,000 members in China.