



OCTOBER 31, 2021 | PASTOR TIMOTHY SONG

“Living Our Lives Worthy of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

Paul’s Ministry in Thessalonica

¹ You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. ² We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. ³ For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. ⁷ Instead, we were like young children[a] among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Good afternoon Church. Today we will be going back to 1 Thessalonians. Last month, I preached on the first chapter. And the core message in Paul’s address to the church in Thessalonica was that a true Christian demonstrates a work produced by faith, labour prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw how much he loved this community. And now, today, we will be looking at chapter 2. So please follow along as I read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

[Read the Text]

This is the word of God. Was there a time in your life when you had to defend your actions? Was there a time when you were falsely accused, and your integrity was on the line? Now, it’s clear that in today’s passage Paul is defending his apostleship and ministry. There were some who were against what Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, were preaching and teaching. They took great offense to the point where they made accusations of false teaching and motives (which we will get to shortly). And although Paul is taking some time to remind the believers in Thessalonica of what they know and have witness with their own eyes, Paul has a greater purpose than just to simply vindicate himself. Notice how many times he says “You know” or “Surely you remember”. If you read through today’s text, he says it five times! This should tell us that what Paul is sharing is not merely words but there is knowledge of Paul and his companions’ character and conduct. And the believers were eyewitnesses to all of it. They knew what Paul was saying to be true.



But again, this passage is not just about vindicating himself. He points out his conduct so that the Christians reading this letter would learn from his example and do likewise. And I believe that this is relevant for us today as well. We really need to take heed the words Paul writes here. And his focal point and purpose in this chapter is revealed in verse 12 where he exhorts the people to “live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory”.

Paul’s goal for these Christians is that they would live lives worthy of God. The ESV translation says, “to walk in a manner worthy of God”. To “walk” meant a steady progress. This is the purpose of life. This is the life every believer must embrace. And this life is a steady journey that must continue to progress. If we read the beginning of verse 12, Paul uses three adverbs to accentuate the importance of this purpose. Follow along with me. It says, “...encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God”. Paul and his companions, more than their own reputations, really had a heart for their brothers and sisters to live out their calling and purpose. But what does it mean to live or walk in a manner worthy of God? If we take a deeper look into Paul’s defense of his ministry and life, we can learn three character traits needed to live lives worthy of God:

1. Boldness (2:1-2)
2. Purity (2:3-6)
3. Love (2:7-11)

So let’s look at our first point.

POINT #1: BOLDNESS (2:1-2)

Paul reminds his readers how he and his friends had been mistreated in Philippi. In Acts 16, we read about Paul and Silas being seized and dragged into the marketplace before all the rulers and authorities (Acts 16:19). The crowd came together and attacked them by stripping their clothes and beating them with rods. They were severely flogged and thrown into prison where their feet were fastened in the stocks (Acts 16:22-24). Paul is recalling these events here in chapter 2. But even though they were shamefully treated, they had boldness in God to enter Thessalonica and share the gospel in the midst of opposition and conflict. Their visit was not without results. In other words, the missionaries didn’t come to take something from the people. No. They came to bring them something. Their hands were not empty. The work of the missionaries bore much fruit. As they were faithful to preaching the gospel, people began to hear, receive and believe the saving gospel of Christ. The fruit was a community of believers.

Living our lives worthy of God is to have boldness in the face of opposition. We have seen throughout history and throughout the Bible, believers will face opposition. You and I, as Christians, will face opposition. We will face difficulties because of our faith in Jesus. Paul shares to his readers what happened to him and Silas as a reminder that this is what Christians will experience. What these Thessalonian believers were going through in regards to persecution and affliction was not unusual. Listen to what Peter writes to encourage fellow Christians:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you...However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name (1 Peter 4:12-14,16).



We should not be surprised when trials come to test us, and we suffer because of Jesus. But perhaps we try to avoid any type of suffering. Perhaps we compromise our beliefs and actions in order to live the most comfortable life. Our trials and hardships should lead to rejoicing because we share in Christ's suffering. Brothers and sisters, we must be bold. And where does this boldness come from? It comes from God. Paul writes that "with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel". The proclamation of the gospel flowed freely out of the mouths of Paul, Silas and Timothy without fear but rather having complete confidence. They took courage and confidence in God. Even though they suffered much, they also experienced how God sustained them throughout the turmoil. He would write things like how to "be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10). Or when he says how the Lord's "grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). There was a confidence and trust in the Lord; a boldness that allowed Paul to stand firm and continue to run the race God had planned for him. And that was to proclaim Christ and preach the gospel.

Like Paul and his companions, we must proclaim the good news of Christ even when we are mistreated and knowing that difficulties will come for doing so. When else will we be tempted to deny Christ except when we are experiencing opposition and resistance? We are being reminded that we must remain bold toward God even when we are met with strong opposition. APPLICATION: Assessing our boldness in Christ individually and as a church. What does it mean to be missional? What needs to change?

That's the first character trait we see living our lives worthy of God. The second character trait is purity.

POINT #2: PURITY (2:3-6)

Paul addresses three accusations that his opposition attempt to attack their integrity and ministry with. Look with me in verse 3: "For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you". Paul and the other missionaries are accused of speaking from error, impure motives, and attempting to trick the people. Paul refutes each accusation. First, the preaching was NOT from error; the preachers were not wrong. How could the gospel of God be a mistake? Second, it was NOT from impure motives, which implies that the preachers had been accused of immorality. Back in those days, many cults were accused of sexual and religious prostitution. And it seemed that Paul was being accused of such immorality; which he denied. And third, the preachers were NOT trying to trick the believers. The word "trick" was described as a mean to deceive or trap; like catching fish with bait.

Paul denies these allegations and responds in verse 4 with truth over these lies: "On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people, but God, who test our hearts". Paul continues in verses 5-6: "You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority". Paul responds by saying that he does not come to the believers in Thessalonica with words of flattery (which was the use of acceptable speech with the purpose of lulling someone into a sense of security so that one may obtain one's own ends). He did put on a mask to cover up greed. Paul didn't hide his real motives in order to secure personal profit. But also, Paul and his companions did not seek glory and praise from people or make demands as apostles of Christ. They did not pretend or be fake. The point that Paul is trying to make here is that living lives worthy of God means having pure hearts and pure motives. This is what they demonstrated to these Christians.



Focus on what the gospel means for Paul and what it should mean to us. If we look at verse 4, Paul says, “So we speak [the gospel] not to please people, but God, who tests our hearts”. We must not worry about pleasing people. We must worry about pleasing God. He knows our hearts. God knows if we are trying to please Him or please people. Brothers and sisters, it is exhausting trying to live your life to please others, isn't it? It's an impossible goal. Why? Because people's desires and expectations always change. Don't we all struggle with this? We sometimes make decisions based on what other people think. We live under the fear of the reaction of others. But we must live to please God. This is where knowing that God does not change is so important and valuable. His character and His commands never change. So we have a target that does not move. We know what pleases and displeases God. This must be our aim and goal as Christians. Living a life worthy of God means we care about what God thinks. ILLUSTRATION/APPLICATION:

Living our lives worthy of God must be characterized by boldness and purity. The final character trait we need to live lives worthy of God is love.

POINT #3: LOVE (2:7-12)

The final thing we see in today's passage is that living our lives worthy of God is showing love for others. It was clear how Paul, Silas and Timothy felt about their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Read with me starting from verse 7: “Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (2;7-8). The NIV translation has the noun “young children”. But in other translations, the adjective “gentle” is used. So Paul is saying that they were “gentle among them”. When we think of young children, I wonder if the first thing we think about is gentle. However, what Paul is trying to say here is that when they came to Thessalonica, they came with hearts that were gentle. You see that he continues with that thought as he describes their gentleness and care like a nursing mother who cares for her child. Imagine the kind of care and love a mother gives.

The gospel imparts a nurturing spirit to those who believe. This was the closest description Paul could think of when he thought of this community of believers. This is what the gospel does to the heart: it stirs up a tender-heartedness that develops intimacy and an inclination for lives to be shared.

If you continue in v.8, Paul says “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you...” You know, sometimes, people may say that love is a choice or a decision. They say that love is an act; something you do. I think that's true. But the kind of love we sense here with Paul, it feels deeper; there's more substance. The gospel causes believers to feel genuine affection for one another. Now, I'm not everyone must romantically fall in love with one another. No. Both Paul and Peter commanded all Christians to “Love one another with brotherly affection/kindness”. The Greek word for love here is “philadelphia”, which means brotherly love. Christians should have a heart for one another, not just a dispassionate commitment or sense of duty to do good. 1 Peter 1:22 tells us to “love one another deeply, from the heart”. Do not just love one another out of duty or because you know you should. No. Love one another deeply and earnestly from the heart!

This is not a surface level love for them. Paul loved them to such a degree that he did not only share the gospel but also shared his life with them. They gave themselves completely to these Christians without reservation. We live in a time where we refuse to open up to each other. We stand at a distance from others. we put up walls and do not let people in. but that is not living lives worthy of God. Paul showed what it means to be a Christian. Walls were broken.



Let's pause and ponder the impact of this. Go back to the first two verses of this chapter. What had happened to Paul and Silas in Philippi? They were seized, dragged, beaten, and imprisoned. Would you be afraid to open up to people in Thessalonica after what you had just experienced in Philippi? Of course, there would be hesitation! In the time Paul was with these people, he completely opened up to them and shared the gospel and his own life. He showed his care for them, like a nursing mother cares for her children; with gentleness and compassion. APPLICATION: Not just for pastors and leaders, but for every one of us!

But then you might be asking, "What does it mean to share our lives with one another?" Or, "What does sharing our lives look like?" It is not just sharing the gospel. Of course, the proclamation of the Gospel is foundational! But Paul says that he and his companions "were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (v.8). You have not shared your life when you only shared information – even though it's the most valuable and life-saving word. The missionaries cared for the people so much that they were "affectionately desirous" for them. This isn't sexual in nature. We didn't read this verse but look with me in v.17. It says, "But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you." Is there someone in your life that you have this intense longing to see? There is a deep bond and friendship here. Though Paul and his companions were busy going around sharing the gospel and facing opposition, they continued to think and long to see their brothers and sisters in Thessalonica.

They remind the people of their toil and hardship (v.9); how they worked night and day in order to not burden anyone while they lived among them. They weren't there for personal gain or to make money off of the people. But they worked, just like many of us work, to make a living so that the people didn't feel any burden to pay them. Paul was a tentmaker. So he probably spent nights and days working so that he could spend time with people to do life with them. It was probably non-stop for him. In Acts we're told that he spent three weeks with the Thessalonians. Could you imagine the sleepless nights and every moment being used for the purpose of sharing the gospel and their lives. Paul loved them so much that he wanted to give them the most precious gift he had: Jesus Christ. And they demonstrated Christ-like character through how they loved them like a mother who loves their child.

When you share your life, you let a person in to see what is really there. You do not hide your true feelings about things. Other translations use the word "soul": They shared their souls with the believers. A shared soul is a shared passion or a shared fear or a shared guilt or a shared longing or a shared joy. John Piper wrote that, "Where the gospel flourishes, people share their own souls." That's what happens when you love someone deeply: you share in one another's passion, fear, guilt, longing and joy.

APPLICATION: We should pause and consider whether we are sharing our lives with anyone like this. Is the gospel flourishing in your life? We always just think that evangelism and sharing the gospel is all we have to do. But perhaps there's something missing in our witness and in our fellowship with one another? We must share the gospel. But the gospel truth must compel us to share our lives with others.



This love was further displayed in not being a burden to the Christians (2:9). He was not there for their money. He was not taking advantage of them. They were holy, righteous and blameless in their conduct (2:10). Read with me the second description Paul uses to describe His love for the people in verses 11-12: "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory." He was like a father with his children. A father teaches and admonishes their children. A father's responsibility is to lead by example; to teach and motivate their child. Fathers encourage by walking alongside their child to aid, direct and instruct them as they grow in their character and conduct. Fathers comfort and support their child when they go through obstacles and failures. A father shows tender compassion as they uplift their child when they struggle and are heartbroken. And finally, fathers also urge their child to live lives worthy of God. They are models and witnesses to living for Christ to their children. This is what a father should be and do. And this was the heart Paul had for his fellow brothers and sisters.

APPLICATION: When we look at Paul, does it not compel you to love one another like this? We must show compassion and gentleness like a "spiritual mother" but also live uncompromising, pure and holy lives like a "spiritual father" that sets the example and standard for each of us to follow. We must continue to faithfully teach one another God's truth through His Word and build up the church with strength, courage and conviction. We must walk alongside each other and grow in obedience to our gracious God. And we do all of this so that God may be honoured and glorified as we live lives worthy of Him.

CONCLUSION

Let me close with this: Paul has spoken of how he had lived his life before them with boldness to proclaim God's message, showing a life of purity as he sought God's approval, and revealed his love for them as he shared his very life with them. he uses these aspects of how he came to these Christians to encourage, comfort and urge them to live lives worthy of God. Now, Paul is not saying that we are earning this blessing or that we need to be worthy of what God has done. That's impossible. God does not tell us to be worthy of what He has done. We cannot be worthy of the love, mercy, and grace He has displayed in Jesus Christ. What God is telling us to do is live in a way that shows that we truly know God what He has done. Live your lives in a way that shows who God is. Know God and make Him known. Live your life in a way that reflects what God has called us to be and do.

And we do that together as the body of Christ. APPLICATION: During this transition, may God awaken our hearts to long for community like this. Pray for the new pastors that they

would be bold, pure and full of love for God's people. Pray that for your relationship with one another.

Notice that Paul says God "calls us into His kingdom and glory" (v.12). That's present tense. Not only did He call us His child when He sent His One and Only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and become our Redeemer. But He is calling us today to continue to live our lives worthy of God.

God is calling each of us. Brothers and sisters, may we progress in walking in a manner worthy of God as we grow in boldness in Christ, purity in seeking to please God, and a tender, compassionate love for one another. Let's pray.