

5.3.20

Leading a Life Worthy of God 1 Thessalonians 2.1-12
Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

“You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. 3 For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. 5 As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; 6 nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, 7 though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. 8 So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. 9 You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. 11 As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, 12 urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

1 Thessalonians 2.1-12 describes **Paul’s previous time in Thessalonica** and **how the gospel was shared with the believers there.**

1. **Paul begins (2:1–2) by speaking of the suffering he, Silvanus, and Timothy faced at Philippi just before to coming to Thessalonica. The first thing we learn from this scripture is In tough times, remember what you know to be true. “You know,” or a variation of it occurs in **verses 1, 2, 5, and 9-11.** Paul is reminding the church of things that have taken place between them that he feels are important and true that they need to remember.**

“You yourselves know,” brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not *in vain*” or without results. The church could look around at the other people gathered with

them in the house and know that was true. Their very presence was the proof that the Gospel of God was at work among them. Changes in their lives after receiving the Gospel as they began living for the glory of God testified to the value and success of Paul's visit.

Paul continues, “*but though we had **already suffered** and been **shamefully mistreated** at Philippi, **as you know**, we had **courage in our God** to declare to you **the gospel of God** in spite of **great opposition**.*” Suffered, shamefully mistreated, great opposition – this is what Paul and his team endured in sharing the Gospel of God. Signing up to be a follower of Christ is not for the faint of heart because there will be hardship that must be faced. There is truth in the saying, “*Tough times don't last, but tough people do.*” Paul describes the hardship they faced, but he reminds them, “***as you know, we had courage in our God...***” Whether one is facing opposition to the gospel or another form of adversity that might strike our heart with fear or uncertainty, part of being a person of faith is **having courage in our God**.

I know a lot of people are frightened and scared right now – people are scared about getting the virus or that it will strike someone they love and care about. People are frightened about finances and wondering when they'll be able to work and if they'll be able to maintain their business or to make enough to pay their bills. In frightening times of uncertainty, it's important to **remember what you know to be true and to have courage in our God**. If we have faith in God and we shouldn't act like people who have no trust in a loving and caring God who is with us especially in times of fear. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, “***Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear.***” For Paul and for us, **sharing the Gospel and living for God's glory is more important than fear. Having courage in God** enables us to face whatever hardship we must as God gives us strength and perseverance to do so. A shepherd was showing a guest his sheep and his dogs, and the guest noticed the dogs going at each other a little bit. The guest asked which dog usually won? The shepherd replied, “*The one I feed the most.*” **What are you doing to feed your courage in God?** When he was being tested in a time of isolation in the wilderness, Jesus told Satan (Matthew 4.4) that a person doesn't

live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Feed your courage through time in scripture and prayer and your fear will start to go hungry.

2. A second part of this passage is about being a **Role model** or a pattern (2:3–6, 9–10). All of us are role models for other people whether we realize it or not. Who might be looking to you as a role model or a pattern to follow? When I was a little boy, my mother used to sew dresses and other things for my sisters. I can remember my mom working from a pattern at the sewing machine in the corner of our dining room in our house in Brookline. If you followed the pattern faithfully, the dress turned out well. In a similar way, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy present themselves **as the pattern for believers to follow and emulate**. Throughout these verses it's always "we" and "our," Paul is speaking throughout for all of them.

Paul uses Negative and Positive Words to describe how not to live and how to live as a believer. Paul uses **negative words** to describe what his team didn't do and what Christians are not do, and he uses **positive words** to describe how his team acted and how we should act. If you have your own Bible, you can look in verses 3-6, and verse 10 and you'll be able to identify these words in whatever translation you use. In my Bible, the negative words Paul uses are **deceit, impure motives, trickery, not to please people, flattery, and greed**. There have always been and still are people in religion, politics and business who are deceitful, who seek to hide their true motivation or purpose, who use trickery and other forms of deception to try and get their way, who seek to please people and tell them what they want to hear rather than the truth, who either give or demand flattery in order to get ahead, and who are greedy and selfish to get all they can for themselves without any concern for other people, the common good, or for those most in need. One doesn't have to look long or hard to see that this wasn't just an issue in first century Greece, there are still plenty of people who live like this today. We don't want words like **deceit, impure motives, trickery, flattery, or greed** to describe us nor should we follow or support someone who lives his or her life in this manner whether in religion, politics, or business. If we recognize these sorts of behaviors or attitudes in ourselves, we need to turn from them, ask God to forgive us, and to try and to move toward the positive actions seen in Paul and his companions that are part of authentic Christian living.

Some of **the positive words** Paul uses in verses 4 & 10 are, *“to please God, pure, upright, and blameless.”* Pleasing God rather than people isn't easy. People are usually more tangible and “real” to us than God as are the consequences of their response to us. Paul's preaching to the Thessalonians was not aimed at making a favorable impression on them. He asked them to remember how he spoke. He never wore a mask or a false face, he wasn't a hypocrite, nor was he preaching to gain something for himself, appealing to **God** as the **witness** of his motives. Paul emphasizes that he and his companions have been approved by God, entrusted with the message of the Gospel, and **their only motivation is to please God who tests their hearts**. One of the hardest parts of preaching that Paul experienced frequently is that in seeking to please God one often ends up angering or disappointing people who don't like hearing things they don't like, disagree with, or challenge their own deeply held beliefs even if those beliefs are contrary to the Gospel of God or the teaching of Christ. That isn't an easy aspect of sharing God's word for anyone.

It's important for us to reflect on these words and the attitudes and behaviors they describe and to think about our own life. If Paul and his team followed you around 24/7 for a week – what words might they use to describe you in a letter? Are they the words you'd want shared? If not, what can you do this coming week to live into how you'd want to be known and more importantly, how God would want you to be? What would you want Paul to be able to write about you?

Paul asserts that he and his team are **pure, upright, and blameless and that's how we are to aim to live our life as followers of Christ**. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:8), *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”* Paul highlights *“whatever is pure”* as one of the things the Philippians (4:8) are to think about. Paul is consistent in his writing that as much as possible we are to be pure, upright, and blameless. The opposite of that which we don't want to be known for is to be impure, crooked, and seen to be engaging in wrongful behavior. As if to emphasize the purity of their motives, Paul reminds the church how he and his companions worked night and day so as not to be burden on the church. Rather than seeking something for themselves they delighted in giving to others freely.

1. In tough times Remember what you know to be true and have courage in God. 2. We are all Role Models for someone and there are negative behaviors we're to avoid and the positive behaviors we're to emulate. The final image I want to share with you is **Paul the Parent** (2:7–8, 11–12).

a. Paul and his companions cared for the Thessalonians as **a loving mother gently nurses and cares for her little children**. The gentleness and unselfishness of Paul as a spiritual parent shines through in this illustration. Paul and his team **not only** gave **the gospel of God**, but also imparted their own selves (literally, “our own souls”) as well. They gave whatever they had in order to help the Thessalonians. The love of Paul and his companions is evident, for genuine love finds expression in giving to people—both to their spiritual needs and their physical needs. Having compared the conduct of the missionaries to the loving, unselfish care of a nursing mother (v. 7), Paul also compared their behavior to that of **a father**.

b. **He encouraged them as would a loving father** (2:11–12). The implication is that they trained and instructed the Thessalonians as a responsible father trains and teaches his children. The word *tekna*, translated **children**, emphasizes the believers' immaturity as well as the apostles' affection. In verse 11 Paul again writes “**you know**” to help them remember what they know to be true. The training Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy provided included positive encouragement, soothing comfort, and earnest pleading. Such a combination of appeals proved effective in moving the Thessalonians to action.

We are all called to help others with the same kind of maternal and paternal love, care, and support that Paul describes; how is that going in your family and your relationships right now? What steps can you take to act more like Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy did to the believers in Thessalonica in terms of your caring, encouragement, comfort, and teaching? I know there are some family relationships that are strained, unhealthy, and even fractured, and while we can never control how another person behaves or acts toward us, we can strive to act in a God honoring way at all times.

All of this leads to the key statement of verse 12: “**lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.**” Paul has tried to show what such a life looks like in all the preceding verses. It's about remembering what we know to be

true and having courage in our God in the face of fear. It's about not being motivated or having one's life marked by **deceit, impure motives, trickery, slavishly seeking to please people, flattery, or greed**. Rather we're called to **please God, to be pure, upright, and blameless, to care tenderly like a mother** with her newborn and **like a good father** to encourage, comfort, and motivate those who are newer in the faith to pursue a Christ-like life.

What's the best invitation you've ever received in your life? Was it a marriage proposal, a college acceptance, a job offer, being invited to attend a World Series game? Last week during the NFL draft we saw young men getting invited to pursue their dream to make it in professional football. Many of them cried with joy upon getting the call. Get in your head the best call or invitation you ever received. No matter how great, wonderful, or awesome it is or was – **it's still not as amazing as the invitation to be called into God's own Kingdom and to share in God's glory**. We are all encouraged to pursue with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, a way of life that is worthy of people called by God into his kingdom and to the hope of sharing in his glory.

Prayer:

Gracious God help us to grasp the amazing nature of your invitation and call to be a part of your kingdom and glory. We feel unworthy of such an offer. Help us as we live the Christian life to evaluate ourselves daily - Each thing I do, everything I say, *"Is this worthy of God? Is this something I would do or say without shame, fear, or embarrassment in the presence of God whose nature is both love and holiness?"*

We remember Adam and Eve, hiding in the bushes, because they knew they had done something unworthy of you, before you even sought them out. We don't want to be like them. Help us to pursue a lifestyle that reflects the life of Christ, your glory, and your continuing call to holiness. Help us to live in the balance between your gracious call and invitation and our need to walk in a manner worthy of You every day of our lives. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Blessing May you be inspired by the example of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to lead a life worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Amen

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Why is remembering what we know to be true from God's Word important in tough or difficult times?
2. Paul writes, "*We had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.*" What are you doing to feed your courage in God? What are you doing to starve your fears?
3. Paul uses negative and positive words to describe how not to live and how to live as a believer. The negative words Paul uses are "*deceit, impure motives, trickery, not to please people, flattery, and greed.*" What do those words make you think of?
4. The positive words Paul uses in verses 4 and 10 are, "*to please God, pure, upright, and blameless.*" What do those words make you think of?
5. What are the maternal and paternal characteristics Paul uses in (2:7–8, 11–12) to describe how he, Silvanus, and Timothy felt about the Thessalonians and how they acted toward them? Why are these traits important in our relationships?
6. In your own words describe what it means "*to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*"