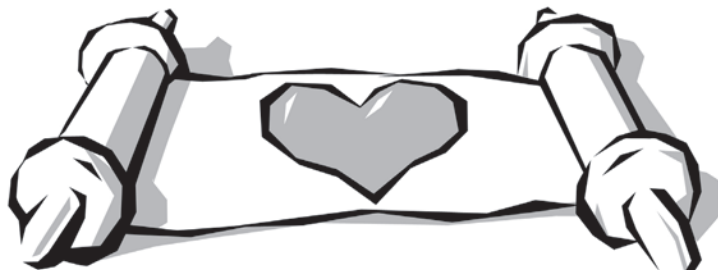


The Apostles'¹ Example (1 Thessalonians 2:1–12)



SABBATH—JULY 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12; Acts 16; Deuteronomy 10:16; Psalm 51:1–10; 2 Corinthians 8:1–5; Luke 11:11–13.

MEMORY VERSE: “God has accepted us to preach. He has trusted us with the good news. We aren’t [are not] trying to please people. We want to please God. He puts our hearts to the test” (1 Thessalonians 2:4, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: By showing what the true reason for ministry (work done for God) must be, Paul can help us all to examine our hearts and lives according to the gospel.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON SHOWS AN IMPORTANT CHANGE IN THE ARGUMENTS OF THE FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS. Paul moves from a focus (attention) on the church (1 Thessalonians 1:2–10) to a focus on the apostles and their experience in Thessalonica (2:1–12). In chapter one Paul gives thanks to God because the believers in Thessalonica looked up to Paul as an example for them to follow. In turn, they became models of faithfulness themselves. Now, in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, Paul goes more deeply into the kind of life that helps the apostles to serve as role models.

There are many possible reasons for teaching, preaching, and service. But Paul puts his finger on the one that is most important. It is that ministry is pleasing to God. Paul was not so interested in growing the church in numbers. He was more interested in the church growing in the right spiritual principles (important rules) through God’s grace.² In this lesson we take a closer look at Paul’s private life. Paul bares (opens) his soul in a way that challenges (calls) us to rearrange our own spiritual hopes, dreams, and reasons for serving God so that we will please God and have the right influence on others.

1. apostles—disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

2. grace—God’s gift of mercy that He gives to us to take away our sins.

SUNDAY—JULY 29**BOLDNESS IN SUFFERING**

(1 Thessalonians 2:1, 2)

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

First Thessalonians 2:1 picks up on the themes (ideas) of the first chapter. The “you know” (NirV) of this verse reminds us of the same language in 1 Thessalonians 1:5. So, Paul is continuing the themes that he raised in the opening chapter of the letter. The end of the first chapter discussed what “everybody” knew about the Thessalonians. In this chapter Paul discusses what the readers know about the apostles and their devotion to the faith.

Paul remembers how he and Silas were shamefully treated in Philippi while preaching the gospel there. On the long road from Philippi to Thessalonica, every step was a painful reminder of that treatment. There is no doubt that Paul and Silas had outward scars on their bodies when they arrived in Thessalonica. It would have been easy for the apostles to take a less bold method of evangelizing³ 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. Paul’s and Silas’ experience very well could have made them think, “Don’t [do not] 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, Paul and Silas “began to be bold” (1 Thessalonians 2:2, author’s translation), even though they knew that trouble would arise again. There was a strong difference between their weak human condition and the power that God had given to them.

In the end, the Lord used Paul’s and Silas’ sufferings to His glory (praise and honor). The wounds of the preachers gave proof of two things to the Thessalonians. First, their wounds showed that the gospel they preached truly came from their strong beliefs in God. They were not doing it for their own profit. (Read 1 Thessalonians 2: 3–6.) Second, it was clear to the hearers that God was with Paul and Silas in a powerful way. The gospel that they preached was not just of man’s making. Instead, it came with the living presence of the Lord, as shown in the lives of the apostles. (Read verse 13.)

What would you point to as proof that God has changed your life? How is this proof seen by others? Or is it seen at all?

MONDAY—JULY 30**THE CHARACTER OF THE APOSTLES (1 Thessalonians 2:3)**

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:3. What key (main) point is Paul making about reasons for serving God?

3. evangelizing—spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

It was widely known in the ancient world that there were three keys (steps) to making people change their ideas or practices. People judge (1) the power of an argument on the character (who someone is) of the speaker (in Greek: *ethos*), (2) the quality (how good something is) or logic (reasoning) of the argument itself (*logos*), and (3) the power of the speaker's plea (appeal) to the hearer's emotions (strong feelings) or self-interest (*pathos*). In 1 Thessalonians 2:3–6, Paul points to the character of the apostles as an important part of the preaching that influenced the Thessalonians to change their lives.

In these verses, Paul shows a difference between himself and the popular speakers who preached for profit. (Read lesson 3.) Paul uses three words in verse 3 to describe possible bad reasons for preaching or ministry.

The first is *error*, or a wrong idea. A preacher may be excited about an idea that is simply wrong. He or she may be honest but self-deceived. The preacher may think he or she is doing good for others, but he or she is inspired (filled; moved) by false ideas.

The second word is *unclean-ness*, or *impurity* (not pure). People are attracted to individuals who are widely known for their power, ideas, or actions. For this reason, speakers can be led to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. For example, they can be driven by a desire for sex or power.

The third word is best translated as *deception*,⁴ or *trickery*. In this case, the speaker knows that the ideas are wrong, but he is trying hard to mislead people for his profit.

Paul and Silas were not doing any of these things. If they had, their experience in Philippi would probably have made them quit preaching. The bold preaching that they did in Thessalonica was done only by the power of God working through them. Their good arguments and emotional (having strong feelings) pleas were not enough. Instead, the characters of the apostles were partly responsible for the power of the gospel in Thessalonica. (Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5.) Their character shone through in their sermons. And the apostles' characters were clearly in line with what they preached. Practicing what you preach had great power in Paul's world, just as it does in ours.



There are three keys to a message that changes lives. It must (1) show that it changed the speaker's life, (2) have strong reasoning, and (3) touch hearts.

4. deception—the act of tricking someone into doing something wrong.

Think through your own reasons for all that you do. How pure are they? How free are they of error? If they are not what they should be, how can you change them for the better? Read also Deuteronomy 10:16; Philippians 4:13; and Psalm 51:1–10.

TUESDAY—JULY 31

PLEASING GOD (1 Thessalonians 2:4–6)

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:4–6. Describe the sharp (strong) difference between Paul’s reason for ministry and the worldly choices he mentions. Why is it not always so easy to see the differences? How can people deceive themselves about how pure their reasons are? Why is that so easy to do?

The word often translated as “approved” (accepted) (1 Thessalonians 2:4) shows the idea of testing or examination. God tested the apostles to see how honest and pure their lives and reasons were. The purpose of that testing was to make sure that they practiced what they preached.

The popular philosophers (thinkers) of the day wrote about how important it is to practice self-examination. Suppose you want to make a difference in the world. These philosophers taught that you need to examine your reasons and plans.

Paul took this idea one step further. In addition to examining himself, Paul was examined by God. God accepted that Paul truly practiced what he preached. In fact, God is the only one worth pleasing.

People need to have a good sense of self-worth in order to work well. We often try to find this worth by buying property, getting honors, or receiving positive opinions from others about us. But all of these sources of self-worth last only a short time. True self-worth is found only through the gospel. When we fully understand that Christ died for us, we begin to experience a sense of worth that nothing in this world can replace.

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

Using flattery to please people is a poor basis for evangelism.⁵ Paul does not care about what other people think of him. Paul also refuses to accept another worldly reason for ministry: money. People who have been blessed by someone’s ministry are usually eager to give money to that ministry. This can tempt God’s workers to forget that their only reason for ministry is to please God.

What in your life pleases God, and why? What does not, and why not?

5. evangelism—the act of spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.



When we understand that Christ died for us, we experience a sense of worth that nothing in this world can offer.

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 1

CARING DEEPLY (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8)

In 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Paul's most important reason for ministry is to please God. What additional motivation or reasons does Paul bring up in the verses that follow? Read 1 Thessalonians 2:6–8.

In today's world, some may mistakenly think that money, sex, and power are often good reasons for working hard for ourselves. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3–6, Paul discusses several different sins that his followers can rule out as reasons for his ministry. Greed, immorality (sexual sins), deception (trickery), and flattery have no place in Christian life and ministry. The apostles were inspired (moved) only 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 they could have taken advantage of their honored

positions. As apostles and teachers, they could have demanded praise for their positions. They could have expected to be paid for their work and to be treated with special honor. But in Thessalonica, Paul refuses to take advantage of new believers.

Paul's most important desire was to please God. But in verses 7 and 8, he adds another reason. This reason is his great love for the Thessalonians themselves. Verse 8 uses the language of emotional (full of feeling) warmth. Preaching the gospel was much more than a duty for Paul. He gave his heart, even his whole self, to the people.

Thessalonica was a part of Macedonia. How did the church of Macedonia accept the love of the apostles for them? Read 2 Corinthians 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 study we named the three important keys (steps) for winning souls: (1) the character (who someone is) of the speaker (*ethos*), (2) the wisdom of the argument (*logos*), and (3) the call for emotion or self-interest (*pathos*). In verses 4–6, Paul points to the characters of the apostles as being a reason to follow them. In verses 7 and 8, we see a call for *pathos*, the emotional bond (unity; oneness) that developed between the apostles and the Thessalonians. In other words, the gospel is at its most powerful when it touches the heart.

Think about the character of someone who spiritually influenced you in a positive way. What was it that specially touched you? How can you learn to copy the same traits (qualities)?



In today's world, money, sex, and power are often given as good reasons for working hard.

THURSDAY—AUGUST 2

NOT TO BE A BURDEN (1 Thessalonians 2:9–12)

While Paul was in Thessalonica, what other things did he do when he was not preaching the gospel, and why? Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 10.

The idea that Paul was working “night and day” would be too much if we take it as fact. But the Greek meaning of those words means an idea rather than the real amount of time spent. In other words, Paul was saying that he worked beyond the call of duty so that he would not be a burden to the Thessalonians. Paul did not want anything to stand in the way of his witness to them.

In addition, Paul was very careful to behave in such a way so as not to cause people to suspect him of wrongdoing.

(Read 1 Thessalonians 2:10; and Luke 2:52.) Paul and the apostles tried hard to be “blameless” in their relationships so that people would not lose attention to the importance of the gospel.

What example did Paul make in 1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12 to describe his treatment of the Thessalonians? Read also Luke 11:11–13. What does that example teach?

The good father gives both reasonable limits and encouragement, as well as love. He adjusts his rewards and discipline to the special character and emotional condition of each child. Depending on the child and the situation, the father may offer encouragement, a serious talk, or punishment.

In the same way, Paul always adjusted his methods in his missionary work. For example, he always tried to adjust his method to the special character and situation of the people. But he also was very concerned that all his methods served the same purpose, which was to spread the gospel. How can one be true to the gospel and yet be “all things to all people”?

The key is the love Paul had for his believers. He did all he could to be a perfect example for them. But he also understood that there were things believers were not ready to handle. (Read also John 16:12.) So, Paul worked with his hands and adjusted his methods so that he could avoid unnecessary obstacles to people's acceptance of the gospel. A powerful lesson in self-sacrifice,⁶ for sure!

6. self-sacrifice—giving of one's self in order to save or help others.



Paul did not want anything in his life to stand in the way of his witness to the Thessalonians.

FRIDAY—AUGUST 3

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “A Christian is not a true disciple of Christ if his heart is not filled with true love for people. . . . He might claim that he is very generous in helping the poor. But if he does not do so out of true love for fellow-men, God does not respect or accept him completely.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 318, 319.

“Paul was careful to set before the new believers the plain teaching of the Bible about the proper support of the work of God. . . . But, at different times, during his ministry in the great cities he tried to earn a living with his own hands. . . .

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

“But Paul did not feel his manual labor [work done with the hands] as time lost or wasted. . . . Paul gave his fellow workers instruction in spiritual things. But he also set an example with his hard, manual labor. He was a quick, skillful worker, faithful in business. He

lived the truth that you should ‘never let the fire in your heart go out. Keep it alive. Serve the Lord’ (Romans 12:11, NIV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pages 234–236.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about a painful time that you have suffered (physically, spiritually, emotionally). How does someone find joy or courage in the midst of such suffering? Why is finding that joy and courage so much easier to talk about than to do?
- ② Think about someone whose life clearly did not show that he or she was a true Christian. How did that person influence your own walk with the Lord?
- ③ What are the traps in becoming emotionally connected to people with whom you are sharing the gospel? How do you set proper limits to the relationships that develop whenever you work closely with other people?

SUMMARY: In these verses, Paul opened his heart to show the truest reasons for ministry. The greatest reason is to please God. It does not matter whether or not people are pleased with the preaching. Money, sex, and power are not reasons for serving God. They have no place in a heart dedicated to pleasing God. The next most important reason for ministry is heartfelt love for the lost. Both of these reasons are clearly shown in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12.