

“Leading from a God-pleasing Life”

1Thessalonians 2:1-12

October 17, 2021

By God’s providence (and no plan of our own), we land on 1Thess 2:1-12 on this candidating weekend with the Cabalka’s. What a joy to have them with us and what a joy it has been for us to walk through this season of exploring partnership with them for the kingdom of God. One of the things that has given us confidence to present them for you as a congregation is the consistency of their lives in what matters most—walking in a deep abiding relationship with Jesus and the corresponding godly character that results from life with Jesus.

I have been deeply vested in this process for several obvious reasons: 1) In seeking my partner and co-laborer in ministry, I want the best possible affinity with him. 2) I want him and his family to be a good fit for partnering with you, 3) I’m looking through the lens of Micah and Levi’s dad for someone with a quality of life I can urge them to imitate.

Just to be clear, I want to reiterate what Dave Jorde said the other night. We don’t expect perfection from Connor. We are confident that he will live and lead with a sincere desire to honor Christ and uphold the Scriptures. But we also know that in the daily mill of life, there will be some areas where he will need to gain experience and where he will benefit from being mentored. That’s all a part of the package. Paul had confidence in Timothy and he took him under his wing. And like Paul to Timothy, I plan on pouring into Connor along with our elders, even as he pours into others. This is the way life in the church is supposed to be!

When we walk through a search process, there are a number of things for us to take into consideration: calling, giftedness, experience, education, character, and one’s personal walk of abiding in Jesus. And each of these elements carry a certain weight, but they don’t all carry the same weight. For example,

- one’s **call** to vocational ministry is important yet subjective. In a sense, we could say that all believers are called to serve in ministry while some are called to serve specifically as pastor-teachers (shepherds).

- **Giftedness** is a great advantage, but not unique to ministers. Every believer is uniquely gifted to build up the body of Christ and strengthen the ministry of the gospel. But we don’t rely on a man’s giftedness.
- **Education** is necessary. We must have a firm grasp of biblical doctrine. Yet some of the best education continues far beyond school, and in fact, education never stops for the one who has a true learner’s spirit. One of my frustrations at this stage of my life (20 years out of seminary) is struggling to read enough (or fast enough) to keep up with all that I need to learn.
- **Experience** is irreplaceable yet only gained by experience.

All of these elements are important, yet none of them (even comprehensively) are able to sustain a godly, fruitful ministry without the strength of godly character that is born out of a consistent life of abiding in Jesus. By the way, I’m not just speaking to this candidating weekend. I am talking about the NT’s teaching on qualifications for spiritual leadership which Paul models for us in 1Thess 2. Except for the ability to teach, every qualification for church leaders (1Tim 3; Titus 1) is based on godly character.

Or to put it another way, when a minister falls it is not because of a lack of calling, giftedness, education, or experience. It is the result of a breach of character that cannot be divorced from a breakdown of his relationship with Jesus.

As we come to 1Thess 2, Paul unveils, through the example of his own life, *six qualities of authentic spiritual leadership*. And while Paul highlights his example as a minister of the gospel, these leadership principles are applicable to parenting and any other realm of leadership or relationships in which we have influence.

The aim of spiritual leadership is to boldly and effectively proclaim the gospel from a God-pleasing life so that others will also live God-pleasing lives. Before we launch into the specifics, notice from the big picture the parallel relationship between Paul’s aim to please God who examines the heart (vs. 4) and his aim for the church to live God-pleasing lives in vs. 12. **[vs. 4, 12]** So Paul is proclaiming the gospel from a God-pleasing life with the hope that others will believe, also resulting in God-pleasing lives. *All of*

ministry is oriented toward honoring God. And that desire to please and honor God not only dictates what we do, but also how we do it.

Six qualities of authentic spiritual leadership:

1. **A commitment to courageously speak the Word of God (2:1-2)**

[2:1-2] We know from chapter 1 that Paul's ministry was not in vain in Thessalonica because the gospel had radically transformed their lives from serving idols to serving God alone. And they themselves became influential messengers for the gospel throughout the whole region. Yet this would not have happened had Paul not been *bold* in face of persecution. He had been imprisoned in Philippi for preaching the gospel just before he came to Thessalonica, yet persecution did not deter him from boldly preaching the gospel to the Thessalonians. *The gospel will not progress without boldness*—that's true in your life too.

But where does this boldness come from? Paul says it was “boldness *in our God*.” God was the only explanation for Paul's boldness because on a human plane it was an invitation to persecution. True spiritual boldness is always rooted in our confidence in God. This is why human weakness is the best tool to display God's power (2Cor 12:9-10).¹ Like Gideon, Moses, or Paul, the realization of our human weakness poises us to actively trust in the power and faithfulness of God. Boldly sharing the gospel is the result of God working through our human weakness as we trust in Him.

This is an essential quality of spiritual leadership. As we pray for God to raise up elders and pastors, we look for a commitment to speak and uphold the word of God. But this is not just relevant to elders and pastors. If you are a father, you are the spiritual leader of your family. If you are a mom or Christian businessman or have leadership influence among friends or anywhere else in life, your first concern must be upholding the principles and values of God's word in your leadership.

2. **The integrity and accountability of walking in the Fear of God (2:3-4)**

[2:3-4] Those who were persecuting Paul were hoping to ruin the Thessalonian church by destroying the believers' confidence in the one who planted the church.² And so they slandered Paul's character, accusing him of error, impurity, and deceit. Yet Paul reminds them that because of God's gracious favor, he had been entrusted with the gospel. Therefore, Paul's driving motivation was not to please men, but to please God who examines the heart. In other words, Paul's ministry had integrity because He walked in the fear of God. He is more concerned with pleasing God than making people happy or avoiding their displeasure. He knows that He will give an account to God for his life and his stewardship of the gospel.

Can you see how the fear of God would strengthen Paul's boldness? Boldness is not only the result of faith in God (trusting in His power), but also walking in the fear of God (seeking to do what is right and pleasing in His eyes). **Faith in God + The Fear of God = Boldness in God**

Walking in the fear of God is essential to godly leadership, whether in the church, or in the family or the workplace.

3. **A spirit of humility rather than a spirit of self-seeking (2:5-6)**

[2:5-6] It was common for religious charlatans of Paul's day to use flattery as a way of working their greedy hands into people's pocketbooks. But true godly leadership is not greedy for money nor is it self-seeking for personal glory or personal influence. Paul was actually cautious in asserting his spiritual authority because godly leadership is characterized by humility that refuses the temptation to pursue personal gain, out of a godly jealousy for God's glory and the growth of His people.

Humility that conquers the spirit of self-seeking in one's soul is not just for church leaders. It begins in the home, in marriage and includes every other relationship in life. God's will for you is to grow in humility and lead with humility.

4. **Gentle and affectionate servanthood like that of a mother (2:7-8)**

¹ John MacArthur, MacArthur NT Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians, pg. 35.

² Ibid., 32-33.

[2:7-8] Rather than being authoritarian (“asserting our authority”—vs. 6), Paul’s leadership had a depth of love and tenderness that was akin to a mother’s gentleness with a newborn. A mother not only cares for the child but pours out the whole of her life to the child and she does this with only one primary motivation—love. The point here is not only the spirit of gentle, tender care, but also the *extent* of one’s selfless serving. Who can calculate how much a mother does for her child out of love? This is the heart that should characterize authentic spiritual leaders—a willingness to impart one’s life, to pour out one’s life, out of tender-hearted love so that the gospel can be formed in others. We need to think of spiritual leadership and life in the body of Christ as more than teaching and programs. The best teaching and leadership result in doing life together, imparting our lives to each other.

For example, it is one thing to teach on marriage and parenting. It is quite another to have people in your home where they can see you doing family life in real time. Spiritual leaders who impart their lives to others will not be distant or aloof. Rather their gentleness and their loving, serving spirit will make them approachable and safe.

5. **Selfless, godly character displayed in daily life** (2:9-10)

[2:9-10] Verse 9 indicates that Paul worked hard at his “tentmaking” job so that he could provide ministry to the Thessalonians without the burden of financial support. There are two reasons for this. First, Paul did not want anyone to question his motives or the legitimacy of the gospel in a culture that had been overrun with religious swindlers. Second, these believers in Thessalonica were severely poor (2 Cor 8:2). Notice the selflessness required for Paul to be self-supporting. Paul selflessly lived his life in such a way that people, not to mention God, could testify to his devout, upright, and blameless behavior. These three words (“devout, upright, blameless”) emphatically prioritize holiness as an indispensable quality in a spiritual leader’s life. This does not mean that he will be perfect, but that his life is noticeable *set apart for God*.

To lead well, we must be walking in the direction of purity which requires diligence, hard work, and a self-disciplined life. The Christian life is not free-style, nor is it legalistic works. It is a road of grace that empowers us to align our daily lives with Jesus.

This selfless, godly character displayed in *daily life* is reflected in the qualifications for elders in 1Tim 3:4-5 where Paul says that elders must manage their household well...for if a man does not know how to manage his own household (i.e. daily affairs), how will he take care of the church of God? So spiritual leadership is first established in the home and then applied to the church.

6. **Loving leadership like that of a spiritual father** (2:11-12)

[2:11-12] Last week at our fathers and sons’ discipleship small group, Chris Klein was reminding our boys that though Christianity has a tender, loving power to it (like that of a mother—vs 7), Christianity also has a very masculine side to it, whereby we are called to rise up with a wartime mentality toward the sin that wages war against our souls. Young men, we are called to be tender warriors! Here in verse 11, Paul now brings out the masculine strength needed for authentic spiritual leadership—the strength of a father. Fathers are not passive. They take initiative to exhort, encourage, and implore their children to walk in a way that pleases God.

- *Exhort* - This is an interesting word that literally means to “come along side.” It includes both the concepts of comforting but also calling one to action, urging one to do what is right. Fathers both comfort their children and call them up. Spiritual leadership, like that of a father, means that we come alongside others to comfort them while at the same time calling them to actively move forward in their faith and obedience to God.
- *Encourage* – Encouragement both consoles and builds another up. Just as good fathers do not aim to tear their children down but to console and strengthen them, so spiritual leaders pursue a ministry of encouragement for the sake of godly living.
- *Implore* – the Greek word here can either be translated as imploring (pleading with) or more likely in this context has to do with testifying to the truth. The point is that spiritual leaders resemble good fathers who press their children to the truth.

This is what godly leaders do regardless of whether they lead in the church or at home or in the marketplace. They exhort—they call people up. They encourage—they build people up. They Implore—press others to the truth.

Paul concludes now in vs. 12 with the very purpose or goal of his leadership: *“so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”* Paul’s aim has little if anything to do with himself. He wants believers (those whom he leads) to grow in such a way that God is glorified through their own God-pleasing lives.

What does it mean for us to walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls us into His own kingdom and glory? It means that our character resembles His character—the character we see in Christ. Where does that character come from? From abiding in Christ. Remember the disciples were recognized as those who had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

Walking in a manner worthy of God who calls us into His kingdom and glory means that our lives are lived in a way that is consistent with life in God’s kingdom and that what we glory/delight in is what God delights in (humility, truth, grace, gentleness and ultimately God Himself).

Beloved, our aim is to be good stewards of the gospel, living God-pleasing lives so that other will also be influenced to live God-pleasing lives. Where do we begin? By asking one simple question of everything we do and of every interaction with others: Does this please the Lord?

Taking God’s Word to God’s Throne

A Prayer from 1Thessalonians 2:1-12

Father, we pray for our spiritual leaders and for ourselves that you would strengthen us to walk by faith in the fear of God so that we will boldly share the gospel that you have so graciously entrusted to us. Deliver us from the fear of man and turn our hearts from the praise of man to live solely for Your pleasure and honor. Show us how to truly walk in humility, imparting our very lives to others with the gentle love and care of a mother. Incline our hearts to selfless, godly character so that our lives will indeed be holy, set apart for You who examines our hearts. Grant us the strength of a father to actively persuade all with whom you give us opportunity to live God-pleasing lives through the empowering grace and truth of the gospel.

Bless our pastors and elders with increasing wisdom to live and lead from God-pleasing lives and help us do the same so that the gospel will have greater influence through our lives and that many will be brought into the joy and glory of Your kingdom. This we pray in the saving, sanctifying, and all-sufficient name of Jesus! Amen!