



2. 'Ministry – what it looks like'

1 Thessalonians 2.¹⁻¹⁶

Background

In the assessment which he gave in chapter 1 of how a church was planted in Thessalonica, Paul pointed to two important realities. First, there was the way in which his preaching of the Word was invested with the evident power of the Holy Spirit.

But, second, there was the way in which the Lord, by His Spirit living in and through His people, used the example of their living as a powerful means of impacting the city. Remember how in chapter 1 Paul had declared that *"You know how we lived among you for your sake .."*, highlighting the way the Thessalonians *"became imitators of us"* and then themselves *"became a model to all the believers .."* ([1 Thess.1.5-7](#)).

Here in the opening part of chapter 2 Paul picks up (in reverse order) on these means which the Lord had used to plant a church in Thessalonica, addressing, first, the manner of their living (vv.1-12) and then the Thessalonians reception of the message as the very word of God (vv.13-16).

There's a close relationship between the two, of course. The lives of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus are the 3-dimensional canvas on which the Holy Spirit displays the saving power of God; and when the *message* of new life in Christ is well illustrated in the *living* of that new life in Christ, that dual witness to the truth of the gospel is how the Holy Spirit impresses on those exposed to His testimony the fact that it is indeed the very word of God that they've been hearing.

'Kindness has convicted more sinners than either zeal, eloquence, or learning,' wrote F W Faber, the famous hymn writer, 'and these three never had much effect on anyone if they did not have kindness as well.' That's simply another way of expressing the reality to which Paul points here – and a reminder that it's as much who we are as believers, and how we conduct ourselves, as what we have to say, that the Holy Spirit uses to effect conviction in the hearts and minds of those with whom we engage.

Consider carefully, therefore, the description Paul gives of his ministry and the pictures he uses to portray the ways in which he engaged with the people he encountered in Thessalonica. With that in view, while reading the whole passage, it may be helpful to concentrate on **'days' (3), (5), and (7)**.

1) Monday 16th October – resurrection power

Read [1 Thess.2.1-2](#)

“.. with the help of our God we dared to tell you His gospel ..” (1 Thess.2.2)

The gospel is dynamite! Release it and things happen. Light the fuse and results will follow! No matter the opposition and hardness of heart. Sharing the good news of Jesus, through the enabling of God, is the means He uses to bring life. Try it and see!

What drove Paul on in his ministry to share the gospel with others even when he knew he'd face hostility in so doing?

To what extent have you encountered 'strong opposition' to the message of the gospel?

Prayer: *Grant me the courage to stand for You, Lord Jesus, even in the face of pressures to disown Your claim upon my life: may the fruit of such faithfulness be to Your praise.*

2) Tuesday 17th October – living to the Lord

Read [1 Thess.2.3-6](#)

“.. we are not trying to please people but God ..” (1 Thess.2.4)

Whose approval do you seek? In the end, so far as Paul was concerned, the only approval he sought was from the Lord Himself: there was no throwing his weight around, nor anything underhand. Only an awareness of the Lord who tests our hearts.

In what ways does 'peer group pressure', and the desire for popularity, affect the way you live your life?

How does the conviction that God Himself has entrusted us with the gospel find expression in the life of your fellowship?

Prayer: *Fill Thou my heart, O Lord my God, in every part with praise that my whole being, all through each day, may proclaim Thy being and Thy ways!*

3) Wednesday 18th October – giving of yourself

Read [1 Thess.2.7-8](#)

“we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel but our lives ..” (1 Thess.2.8)

Look at the pictures Paul uses to describe the sort of ministry he exercised. Like a young child – trusting and dependent. Like a nursing mother, giving of her very self to nourish her little children. That's what the Lord is like – and thus His servants too.

What qualities in ministry was Paul pointing to when he said that *“we were like young children among you”*?

In what ways is it important for those involved in pastoral ministry to be like 'a nursing mother' and how will this show?

What opportunities do you have to show such a 'giving of your very self'?

The heart of the gospel is found in the Lord's giving His life for us: how *as a fellowship* can such 'self-giving' love be shown?

Prayer: *You have loved me with wonderfully gracious and generous love, O Lord: help me, by the power of Your Spirit, to live that way myself each day.*

4) Thursday 19th October – brothers and sisters

Read [1 Thess.2.9](#)

".. not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God .." (1 Thess.2.9)

Another picture of the way the apostle ministered. 'Brothers and sisters' is how he viewed these new believers: born by the Spirit of God into the one great family of God, and those bonds of brotherly love found expression in practical commitment to them.

In what ways might you be able today to take the strain off some of those who are your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Are you prone to laziness and how have you learned to combat such laziness in yourself?

Prayer: *Thank You, my Father, for the life You have given me in Your Son, and for making me, in Him, Your child. Help me to stand by my brothers and sisters in Christ.*

5) Friday 20th October – kingdom living

Read [1 Thess.2.10-12](#)

".. we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children .." (1 Thess.2.11)

A child. A nursing mother. A brother. And now understanding ministry as that of a father, too. Providing an example, and wisely, lovingly and constantly developing a truly kingdom lifestyle in his 'children' in the Lord. Encouraging. Comforting. Urging.

What are the particular features of pastoral ministry to which Paul is pointing in narrating the way he dealt with each of them as a father with his children?

Who have been the people through whom this sort of ministry has been exercised in your life, and how did they fulfil this role?

Is it primarily pastors who should be displaying these 'father-like' qualities, or should we all be careful to encourage, comfort, and urge one another on in living in a manner which reflects the life of the Kingdom?

How do you avoid a well-meaning type of pastoring of others which is too 'controlling'?

Prayer: You have called me out of darkness into the glorious kingdom of Your Son, O God: help me so to speak and live that I shall bring His light into the darkness of others.

6) Saturday 21st October – hearing the Word

Read [1 Thess.2.13](#)

".. not as a human word but as it actually is, the word of God .." (1 Thess.2.13)

God Himself can alone open our eyes to the truth that the Bible is indeed *His* Word, to be heard and received as such, and to be so planted in our hearts and lives that, like a seed in the ground, it starts to do its remarkable, transforming work in our lives.

At what point in your life, and by what means, did the Bible 'come alive' for you in such a way that you knew it to be the very Word of God?

What does Paul mean by speaking of God's word as being 'at work in you who believe' and to what extent have you experienced that?

Prayer: Help me to turn each day to Your word and to reflect on what You are saying. Guard my mouth, my eyes, my feet – and help me to walk accordingly to Your word.

7) Sunday 22nd October – bearing the cross

Read [1 Thess.2.14-16](#)

".. you suffered from your own people the same things .." (1 Thess.2.14)

As Jesus bore the cross, so those who are in Him will continue to bear the cost of an hostility directed against our Lord and Saviour. Two great realities to cling to – the resurrecting power of God for those in Christ: the wrath of God for those defying Him.

Why is it that 'everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' ([2 Tim.3.12](#)), and how have you experienced that?

In what ways have you experienced the sort of 'suffering' to which Paul alludes here?

It's not easy being maligned by family and friends: how does what Paul writes here help you cope with such a situation?

The wrath of God is a very alien notion for our society today: how do you go about proclaiming the wrath of God to your unbelieving friends?

Prayer: As You, my Lord, for the joy that was set before You endured the cross, help me also to keep before me the sure hope You have given of Your resurrecting grace.