

R U Ready? 1Thessalonians 2

1Thessalonians 2:1

(KJV) For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

(NIV) You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results.

Beloved, the last thing we should want to be as servants of the living God is vain labourers. Listen to Psalm 127:1.

Psalm 127:1 A Song of degrees for Solomon.

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

The word vain in the Greek speaks of activity that is empty. Paul and his co-labourers in Christ did not minister for hours, days, years to get no result. Everything about their teaching and preaching had intention behind it, fuelled by the Holy Ghost. As travelling missionaries, Paul, Silas, and Timothy followed God's divine GPS to land where they should when they should. No accidental ministry here, folks. God ordained these men Himself and sent them out with purpose and power. You and I similarly are called and sent when we surrender all to God. He fills. He directs. We follow and obey. Simple, right? Paul here is building a case for their team ministry—that God achieved the results they were hearing about now. Therefore, He gets all the glory!

Psalm 115:1

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.

1Thessalonians 2:2

(KJV) But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

(NIV) 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.

Paul furthers his case for his team's fruitful work with the Thessalonian church. Paul is saying essentially that despite fierce persecution within their previous ministry at Philippi, they carried on to the next stop—Thessalonica—in the strength God provided. Perseverance goes hand in hand with counting the cost in ministry, doesn't it? Look at Luke 14:28 (and for context Luke 14:25-33):

Luke 14:28

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Now that I have counted the cost—and experience ongoing hardships—I want this crown at the end of my ministry life, and I pray you do also. Listen to James 1:12:

James 1:12

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

1Thessalonians 2:3

(KJV) For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

(NIV) For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.

Like a masterful defence lawyer, Paul continues to build a case in favour of his team. This time he emphasizes the character he and his team exhibited while living and ministering among the Thessalonians. They were in no way, shape, or form like the charlatans of that day—or some of the televangelists of our day—out for popularity or a quick cash grab. Their motives were pure—inspected and approved by God. Paul’s need to prove his team’s integrity tells us today that there were false teachers abounding all around. He was right to be concerned for his spiritual children after he departed from them.

On the Teaching Room broadcasts throughout the years, we’ve gone over this Scripture again and again:

1John 4:1

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Biblical literacy and scriptural discernment—these two things together—is still our greatest need in the Body of Christ.

1Thessalonians 2:4

(KJV) But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

(NIV) 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.

People do not call, appoint, equip, or anoint. The Bible teaches that God does all of those things through the power of His Holy Spirit. Therefore God receives all the glory for His work in us and through us:

Galatians 2:20

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

This all-encompassing mission of God therefore is above the control of mere mortals. Ministry is not human-centred:

1Corinthians 2:1-5

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

And so, we as ministers are approved by God, but then also accountable to God alone. We cannot serve both humans and God, as Paul points out in Galatians 1:10:

Galatians 1:10

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

1Thessalonians 2:5

(KJV) For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

(NIV) You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.

Flattery and greed—two wicked ways of the evil one, that he uses through false prophets and teachers. Flattery is external—so everyone can hear how fantastic you are by exceedingly elevating others. Greed is internal, and evil, and often is a motive for using flattery—to get what it wants from others. Nasty stuff—and Paul, Silas, and Timothy were not in any part pretenders of faith. Therefore, they had God’s approval.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: How you ever found yourself resorting to flattery? Where do you think that comes from? What was the result of your use of flattery? Why is it wrong? What is the Biblical alternative to flattery?

*STUDY POINT: Find and write out an example of hidden greed that expressed itself as flattery—one example in the New Testament and one example in the Old Testament. Include Scriptural references.

1Thessalonians 2:6

(KJV) Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

(NIV) 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 believed that a worker was worth his wages (1 Timothy 5:18), but he also did not want to be a stumbling block to the gospel message. So, yes, he would work hard so as not to be a burden to his new converts. His team could very well have had expectations and made demands as legitimate apostles, but in making his case here he stresses that they sought no credit or celebrity for anything they did while with the Thessalonian believers.

1Thessalonians 2:7

(KJV) But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

(NIV) Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children,

Catch the tender tone in this text! Paul and his team came on the scene as infants, little babies—just that gentle—parent with baby. Wow.

1Thessalonians 2:8

(KJV) So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

(NIV) 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.

Oh, Lord, let us never minister from our ivory towers, but rather in the trenches with the lost. Jesus, Your compassion—and the love of God—compelled you to come into our messy world as a baby. Beloved, I hope you can grasp the tenderness with which Paul—a former murderer of Christians—ministers here with words. Just as Jesus was a friend of sinners and entered into the mess we are, Paul and his team ministered from the ground up. Amazing.

1Thessalonians 2:9

(KJV) For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

(NIV) 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.

As in 1 Thessalonians 2:6, Paul wanted to get out of the way of the gospel and God's Holy Ghost work, and not be a financial burden to his saved children.

1Thessalonians 2:10

(KJV) Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

(NIV) You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.

Far from boasting here, Paul continues to build a defence against the naysayers by reminding everyone reading his letter that his team's character while living among the Thessalonians really spoke for itself.

1Thessalonians 2:11

(KJV) As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

(NIV) For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,

Again, God never ministers through hostility and manipulation. He is a perfect parent. Paul emulates this parent/child heartfelt care in his discipling of every new convert. Beloved, if ever you feel pushed around or manipulated by the under shepherds caring for you, know this: God does not approve. It's time to move!

1Peter 5:1-4

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

1Thessalonians 2:12

(KJV) That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

(NIV) encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

We need to take seriously the fact that those we minister too are everything to God. It's about what God is doing in their lives and our fortifying of that divine work as God leads. And all of this motivated by the love of God in Jesus Christ.

1Thessalonians 2:13

(KJV) For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

(NIV) And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you

heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

In Paul's day, just as now, there were many options of worldviews, philosophy, and writings by mere mortals. But the Word of God is from God—and it's alive!

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

The Thessalonians got to experience the power of God through the Word of God—for themselves! A great many testimonies I hear from former non-believers (I heard another just this morning!) recall how God spoke directly to them through His Word, and they became Christians. Praise God for His powerful Word!

1Thessalonians 2:14

*(KJV) For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews
(NIV) For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews*

Persecution abounded for the Thessalonians, right from their own families and people. Just as Jesus promised would happen:

Matthew 10:34-36

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

1Thessalonians 2:15

*(KJV) Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:
(NIV) who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone*

Paul's words could encompass specific enemies that he and his team encountered, and really all throughout history who oppose Christ and the gospel message. Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to know that they were not alone in their suffering at the hands of enemy forces—ultimately Satan's demon armies.

1Thessalonians 2:16

*(KJV) Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.
(NIV) in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.*

Imagine the encouragement Paul was sharing to his church! Satan has his eternal punishment coming.:

Revelation 20:10

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

1Thessalonians 2:17

(KJV) But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

(NIV) 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.

Are you thinking of this verse right now:

1Thessalonians 1:2-3

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am! It's the sincere love of God through Apostle Paul, who said that love must be sincere:

Romans 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

1Thessalonians 2:18

(KJV) Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

(NIV) For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way.

Have you ever heard of Satan trying to get in the way of God's working in us and through us? Certainly! Paul was not unaware of the devil's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11) and we should not be unaware either! My brothers and sisters in Christ, stay in prayer and God's Word, for the devil is a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8).

1Thessalonians 2:19

(KJV) For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

(NIV) For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?

1Thessalonians 2:20

(KJV) For ye are our glory and joy.

(NIV) Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

These two verses break me up. Paul so beautifully sums up the gospel with his tender sentiments here.

God so loved the world that He gave...

~ Reverend Darren McClelland