

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 — How Can I Be A Good Spiritual Leader?

March 10, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds! This morning, we are talking about leadership. Leadership is important. A leader's decisions impact many lives, either for good or ill. We all want to follow capable, enthusiastic, inspiring, winning leaders. We can all agree that good leadership like that is in short supply.

We are not just lacking good leaders in our culture, but the church is not better. It might be worse. A few weeks ago, when I was in California, I met with other pastors and leaders in our denomination. The executive assistant to the president shared a static that made my heart skip a beat. He said that in the next ten years, our country will enter a national crisis. When you look at the number of pastors who will retire, compared to the pipeline of young men training to take their place, we have a problem of epidemic proportions. Finding a pastor to fill a pulpit and lead a church will be hard. This past week, there was a shake-up in our denomination. The president of Trinity Seminary resigned. Kevin Komplein, President of the EFCA denomination, was asked to become seminary president. Why did the transition the former college president, who was an academic leader, transition out of the seminary? Why was he replaced with a man who is a seasoned pastor and missionary? If I am putting the pieces together correctly, they want to focus the seminary on producing pastors to meet the national pastoral crisis.

There is not just a scarcity of pastors, but many of the people who are pastors and spiritual leaders are not quality spiritual leaders. They have a loose grip on the Bible and don't know it well. They have a tight grip on many of the

fads in modern culture. This is also a great concern, especially in the mainline denominations.

We find ourselves looking for good spiritual leaders and unsure of what one looks like. Does the Bible tell us what good spiritual leadership looks like? Does the Bible tell us how to be a good spiritual leader in the church? Thankfully, it does. This morning, we are in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, which addresses that topic. Let's read that passage together and learn what good spiritual leadership looks like.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the

gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last! But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. 1 Thessalonians 1–2 (ESV)

Let me remind you about the structure of 1 Thessalonians. When Paul planted the church of Thessalonica, the Jews in the city were hostile toward Paul and Silas. The Jews paid men in the marketplace to start a riot against them. After being in the city for slightly over a month, they were kicked out of town for preaching the gospel. To stir up the city, they were them of treason by telling people to worship Jesus, not Caesar.

They moved down the road to Berea. When the Jews in Thessalonica heard they were in a neighboring city, they sent the rioting crowds from Thessalonica to Berea to kick them out of that city, too. I mention what happened in Berea to show you the level of opposition Paul and Silas faced from the Thessalonians Jews. It was severe.

Later, when Paul wrote the letter of 1 Thessalonians to the church in Thessalonica, he broke into two parts. The first part is Paul defending himself. He was not a rabble-rousing troublemaker the Jews in the city accused him of being.

In the second part of the letter, Paul answered some questions the Thessalonians had about the Christian faith.

Last week, we covered the introduction to the letter in chapter 1. This morning, as we come to chapter 2, Paul begins defending himself. Paul was out of the city, but the trouble-making Jews in the city were trying to destroy the church by undermining Paul's character to the people in the church. They attacked Paul's integrity. They hoped they could destroy the church if they could tear down the church's confidence in Paul's character.

Tearing down the character of a religious leader and showing people why they were spiritual phonies was nothing new. Many tricksters, deceivers, and self-proclaimed religious gurus were around in that day. They were spiritual phonies who, for their own gain, prestige, and power, claimed to be holy men or spiritual gurus. Today, we call them televangelists and health, wealth, and prosperity preachers. They are the religious leaders who deceive people to line their pockets with wealth to gain power and fame. They were throwing Paul in this group of spiritual phonies. They claimed Paul tricked the church into believing his lies. This was why Paul wrote back, defending himself from these accusations. If he didn't address these accusations, some would think there is truth in the accusations, and the truth of the gospel would be compromised.

Let's begin.

[For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 1 Thessalonians 2:1 \(ESV\)](#)

Paul says, "I know what people are saying about me, but you know what happened when I was there. Don't listen to their second-hand accusations when

you have first-hand information.” Last week, in 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul talked about the genuineness of the Thessalonians’s faith. With a grateful heart, he talked about the dramatic change in their lives when they turned from idols to Jesus. He spoke about how Jesus made them into a new person. Jesus didn’t just change their thinking. He changed their lives. He changed what they loved in life. He gave them joy in trouble. The motivation of their hearts was different. They were radically changed people.

When Paul says to them, “...our coming to you was not in vain,…” the word for *vain* is the Greek word for empty. When you trusted in Jesus, it was not empty. It was not fruitless. It was not useless. It was not pointless. He says, you know the dramatic difference Jesus made in your life when you were born again. Overnight, you became different people. You went from being addicted to sin and darkness to loving Jesus and his righteousness. Paul reminds them, you know this. You experienced this.

When people claim I am a religious phony, and the gospel message is an empty trick, he says, “Just look at yourself.” Look at the complete change of heart and life when you trusted in Jesus. That should be enough proof for you to know I am not a manipulator, and the gospel is not a religious trick.

This also applies to us. Have you wondered if the gospel is true? Have you wondered if the Christian faith is an empty belief? Paul tells us, “Look in the mirror. Where did the dramatic change in your life come from if it didn’t come from Jesus?”

In the following five verses, Paul defends his character and life. He will prove that he wasn't a spiritual con man. In going through this. We will see what good spiritual leadership looks like.

What is the heart of a good spiritual leader?

A good spiritual leader is confident in God's power.

But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. 1 Thessalonians 2:2 (ESV)

What made Paul a good spiritual leader? He knew the power of God to energize his ministry and protect him from harm. I didn't say protect him from pain. I said to protect him from destruction until God's purpose for his life was complete. Paul was confident God was more powerful than the opposition he faced, so he didn't bail out.

He wrote about what happened to him at Philippi. This was the city he visited before he came to Thessalonica. You may remember the story. He and Silas wound up in jail for telling people about Jesus. There was a demon-possessed slave girl who told the future for people and made her owners a lot of money. She kept proclaiming that Paul and Silas were speaking the truth about God. Paul eventually became so annoyed he cast the demon out of her. It was a great deal for her because she was no longer demon-possessed, but it was a bad deal for her owners, who couldn't make money off her. They dragged Paul and Silas before the city authorities and falsely accused them. As a result, they were beaten with rods and put in the jail. We read that they were beaten with rods and put in jail, and it doesn't impact us. Read this again. They were tortured

and imprisoned because they told people about Jesus. Paul says they suffered physical torture when speaking about Jesus.

It also says they were shamefully treated. In Greek, that means they experienced legal abuse. The justice system in Philippi was weaponed against them to unjustly judge them and hurt them, even though they committed no crime. Using the legal system as a tool to abuse people is nothing new. It is what happened to Paul.

Paul says that in spite of being physically tortured and legally abused for speaking about Jesus, he maintained his boldness to speak about Jesus.

Paul didn't say, "Man, it didn't go well in Philippi. I was beaten, tortured, and abused. I need a new strategy that is more subtle. He didn't say that he was going to change his message to make it more culturally acceptable and less offensive. He didn't cower. He said, "I was tortured and abused in Philippi. When I go to Thessalonica, I will speak the good news of Jesus again. I don't care what happens to me. I don't care if they beat me and torture me. I don't care if they put me in jail. If I am getting that kind of reaction when lovingly speaking the truth about Jesus, I must be doing something right.

Friends, a preacher's responsibility is not to minimize conflict by toning down the Bible's message or being quiet about Jesus so we don't offend. A good spiritual leader will put their finger in the text, faithfully teach the truth, and let the Bible expose sin. A good spiritual leader will be honest about hell, eternal judgment, and the consequences of sin. They will not be afraid to tell people the truth. They will also hold out Jesus as offering complete forgiveness and a new

life if we turn to him. They will hold out Jesus as the only way to be saved from our sins.

Friends, that kind of message will produce as much opposition today as it did in Paul's day. When we identify sin as the problem and Jesus as the only solution, expect opposition, expect conflict. A good spiritual leader will not shy away from that. Just as Paul didn't.

Paul says he preached the gospel amid much conflict. The Greek word is *agonizomai*, from where we get the English word agony. It refers to a life-or-death struggle. Every pastor and spiritual leader will face pressure to compromise, tone down the message, rewrite the message to make sure it doesn't offend, and pressure to sugarcoat it. My friends, good spiritual leaders know they cannot and must not change the message. They must preach the truth about sin, eternal judgment, and forgiveness by Jesus alone, even if people marginalize them, hurt them, and disqualify them.

How do we find the courage to start strong with the gospel and preach Jesus this way in so much cultural opposition in our day, just like Paul has opposition in his day? Paul told us in this verse.

...we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God...

God was the source of Paul's boldness and strength. When we face opposition, we must remember God is large and in charge. Maybe we will suffer for the gospel, like Paul. Maybe will be beaten with rods and thrown in prison. Maybe we will lose our job. Maybe we will lose our friends. Maybe they will laugh at us. We must remember that God is large and in charge even in our suffering. When we faithfully speak the gospel in times of suffering, God will use our

suffering to move us to places where he wants us to God to share the gospel with people God wants us to reach. In Philippi, the opposition moved Paul to the prison. The Philippian jailer heard the gospel there, and his entire family was saved. You see, don't worry about opposition when it happens. God will us that opposition to get us where he wants us to be to meet people who need to hear the truth.

If the enemy can not get you to be quiet with the gospel or to compromise the gospel, Satan's next attack will be to destroy the character and integrity of the one who shares the gospel.

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,... 1 Thessalonians 2:3 (ESV)

Undoubtedly these were accusations leveled against the apostle Paul. People questioned his character and integrity. Paul claimed those accusations were absolutely not true.

...our appeal does not spring from error...

A good spiritual leader will teach the truth.

The word for *error* is an interesting word. It is the Greek word *planeo*, from which we get the English word planet. It means to wander or to roam. It means to be out of alignment. Error is wandering from the truth. They accused Paul of getting his teaching wrong and being faithful to the Bible. Paul says, "That is not true." He was accurate. He was not attempting to deceive. He was not a false teacher. He was absolutely faithful to the Bible and the truth. He kept his finger in the text.

This applies to us. When you look for a church, don't judge it by its music. Don't ask if it has a good children's program. Don't ask if the preacher is cool because he has a tattoo or if he is good at telling stories about himself. The first question we must ask is, "Is the spiritual leader faithful to the truth? Do they keep their finger in the text?" That is the primary question. All others are secondary questions.

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing... 1 Timothy 6:3-4 (ESV)

Those are strong words. If anyone is not faithfully teaching the gospel message and the good news of Jesus, he is arrogant and ignorant. He is arrogant because he thinks his words are more important than God's words. He is ignorant because if he knew God's words, he wouldn't dare teach his own words in place of them.

A good spiritual leader pursues sexual purity.
...our appeal does not spring from... impurity...

Paul says his appeal didn't spring from error or impurity. The Greek word for impurity is interesting. In the Greek, it means unclean. That is not because Paul didn't pick up after himself at home and needed a maid. This word usually refers to sexual uncleanness. It has always been true that spiritual phonies, false teachers, and spiritual deceivers live sexually impure lives.

That was true in Paul's day, just as it is today. In Paul's day, most religions were associated with some form of sexual perversion. Many of the temples in Thessalonica, like other ancient cities, featured temple prostitutes. Sexual with a temple prostitute was part of the worship experience.

In Paul's day, many men were false prophets, self-proclaimed spiritual gurus who claimed to be holy men. They claimed to have special revelation from God or be in a special relationship with God. It was common for these men to seek sexual favors from the women who admired them as spiritual leaders.

We see this in false religions today. Take the Mormon Church with Joseph Smith. He had 27 wives. The more popular he became as a religious leader, the more women he took. In one case, he told one of his followers, who was married to an attractive woman, that God told this man he needed to divorce his wife so Joseph Smith could marry her. Folks, he was a false teacher. He was a fruitcake. He was a sexually dirty man. This is one of the signs of a false teacher. We see the same thing with Mohammed in Islam. He also had multiple wives. The more powerful he became as a religious leader, the more women he took. One woman was only a girl when he married her as an older man. The girl was still playing with her dolls when he took her to the bedroom. Today, you can get arrested for that.

They accused Paul of being a false teacher, trying to gather women around him for sexual favors. Paul says that is absolutely not true.

A good spiritual leader is honest.

...our appeal does not spring from...any attempt to deceive...

Paul then defends his strategy. He claimed he never attempted to deceive or trick anyone. The Greek word for deceit is *solos*. It speaks of the deception involved in a fish hook or an animal trap. Paul says he was completely honest and didn't deceive anybody. He never tried to use people by hooking or trapping them. False teachers in that day, like today, love to trick people. They usually

deceive people to trick them out of their money, like telemarketers and Internet scammers do today.

I remember watching an expose on a televangelist. It was the story of a father and his son. The son was paralyzed in a wheelchair. The father trusted the prosperity preacher. He gave money to the preacher. He eventually traveled a great distance to attend one of this preacher's crusades and healing services. He hoped this man could heal his son with a miracle. As it worked out, the father, with his son in the wheelchair, could be in the front row of the service. When the service came to healing, he and his son begged the preacher to touch and heal him. People around his son stood up, asking for healing. They were healed, but his son was ignored. It turned out the preacher was all theatrics. The people who were healed were planted in the audience. It was all for theatrics. It was for show. The prosperity preacher couldn't heal the boy because he couldn't heal anyone, but he tricked people into believing he could. That is a false teacher who deceives. They are in it for money. That is the motivation they accused Paul of possessing. Later in this letter Paul will say, "If I was in it for money, why did I work night and day among you to provide for my own financial needs?" I wanted you to know I was not here for money. I was here to tell you the gospel.

Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing,... 2 Peter 2:15 (ESV)

Balaam is another false teacher who was in it for the money.

A good spiritual leader is commissioned by God.

but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God... 1 Thessalonians 2:4a (ESV)

Paul, why are you doing this? If you aren't doing this for the women, and you aren't doing this for money, why are you traveling to different cities around the ancient world, telling people about Jesus, getting beat up, and then heading to the next town? What is your motivation? What drives you to do this?

This idea didn't come from Paul's head. In Acts 9, Jesus met Paul on the Damascus road. Jesus knocked Paul into the dirt and changed his mind. Paul realized he was playing for the wrong team. Instead of persecuting the people of Jesus, Jesus was alive. He needed to tell people about Jesus. Jesus commissioned Paul to share the gospel with the Gentiles. Paul was in the ministry not because he couldn't get another job. He wasn't in the ministry because he didn't finish college. He wasn't in the ministry because he felt it would be fun. He was in the ministry because God called him. God commissioned him. God entrusted him with the gospel message. He didn't have a choice. If he were living to please people or to make money, he would have done something different. He should have done something different. He was obeying the commission God gave him.

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,... Ephesians 3:8 (ESV)
in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. 1 Timothy 1:11 (ESV)

He was in the ministry because God put him there.

This directly connects to what good spiritual leadership looks like today. A good spiritual leader is in the ministry because God put them there, not because they didn't know what else to do with their life. When I went to seminary, one of the first things they did was give us the bootcamp talk. They told us that if we feel

at peace doing anything else, leave and do something else. It will be easier. But, if you are in the ministry because God will not give you peace doing anything else with your life because you have a sense that God called you, and you can not be at peace doing anything else, then you are here for the right reason.

This past week, I told the membership class a little about how I became a pastor. I didn't grow up planning to be a pastor. I graduated from college with a degree in computer science and was interested in learning more about the Bible when a Jehovah's Witness approached me, telling me that if I could read the New Testament in Greek, I would learn that Jesus isn't God. He gave me a booklet that he believed proved that claim. I read it, and at first believed it. Then, I reread it and began studying it. Soon I realized it was untrue. It was deceptive. On page after page, it was lie after lie. I came out of that on fire. I knew why I was a Christian and why other religions, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, were wrong. At that point, the only thing I could feel at peace doing was taking the rest of my life to teach people about Jesus and the Bible, which leads to heaven. I wanted to save people from the lies I was exposed to, which sent people to hell. It didn't matter if I was in a big church or a tiny church. It didn't matter in what part of the world I lived. I knew there was only one thing I felt at peace doing for the next 40 years of my life.

At CrossWinds, when we hire pastors, I look for two things. First, I look for a moment when they felt God would only give them peace if they were preaching the gospel, not running a car wash or a side hustle business selling dried fruit. The second thing I look for is that the only authority they stand upon and teach is

the Word of God, not themselves. Those are foundational pieces for a good spiritual leader.

A good spiritual leader is controlled by God's omniscience.

...so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. 1 Thessalonians 2:4b (ESV)

Paul claimed that he was not accountable for his teaching to the false critics who wanted to tear him down. But Paul was still accountable. He was accountable to God. Paul's critics knew very little about him and the gospel. They had no right to be critical. But Paul answered to God, who knows everything about him, even testing his heart. There is a great measure of accountability in this. A good spiritual leader is not trying to please people. He is trying to please God, who knows everything about us. God knows our hearts. God knows our motives. He knows our desires. He knows our dreams. He knows our hidden motivations and tests all of them. Paul says what controls him is knowing he will answer to God for his life, not his out-of-touch critics.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 1 Corinthians 4:3–4 (ESV)

Paul says he is not conscious of anything against himself. He doesn't have a guilty conscience, but that doesn't mean he is innocent before God. Even if he is not aware of sin in his life, maybe he forgot about it or wasn't even aware of it. God, who knows everything, does not forget about our sins and does not miss our sins.

Paul says what matters to him is what God thinks about him, the God who tests his heart, motives, and character, the God who knows more about him than he even knows about himself.

Someday, we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He will bring to light the things that are hidden, hidden motivations and impure desires.

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. 1 Corinthians 4:5 (ESV)

As Christians, our sins will be brought before Jesus as forgiven, but we will be judged by Jesus to receive our rewards from Jesus. For those who don't know Jesus, their sins will be judged by Jesus to determine the just punishment in the lake of fire. This is why Paul took great pains to have a clean conscience before God.

...for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought... 1 Chronicles 28:9 (ESV)

...I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. Revelation 2:23 (ESV)

A good spiritual leader refuses to manipulate with flattery.

For we never came with words of flattery, as you know,... 1 Thessalonians 2:5 (ESV)

Flattery is paying someone a compliment with the intent of manipulating them toward a particular pattern of behavior. There is nothing wrong with paying someone a compliment because you truly appreciate them and desire to encourage them, but if that compliment is paid to them out of an insincere heart or a desire to manipulate, that is flattery.

Paul says he never conducted himself that way. Good spiritual leaders avoid flattery like it is a COVID ward.

A good spiritual leader isn't in the ministry for money.

...nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. 1 Thessalonians 2:5 (ESV)

A pretext means a cover-up for the real intent. It means a cloak. Paul says we didn't preach the gospel to get money from you. That wasn't our intent. False teachers want sexual favors. They are in it for the money. Their teaching is a cover-up for their greed. As Paul says in this short book, I worked with my hands night and day. I refused to take money from you so you would know I didn't come seeking money from you just to give the gospel to you.

A good spiritual leader doesn't want to be the center of attention.

Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 2:6 (ESV)

The word for seek means to seek habitually. Paul wasn't seeking to be made the center of attention. He didn't want awards. He didn't want honor. He didn't want a special parking spot or an appreciation dinner. He didn't want applause. The only honor he was after was the eternal honor that comes from God.

He had the authority of an apostle, but he never threw his weight around demanding people treat him as someone special. A good leader would never do that.

In these verses, we have seen the internal qualities of a good spiritual leader. As Paul continues, he moves from the state of a godly leader's heart to

how a godly leader lives. Paul moves from defending himself and telling people how he didn't conduct himself to telling people how he did.

He will describe his leadership style as that of a mother and father. There is an appropriateness in this. The church is a family. Just like every family needs a father and a mother to raise children, every church needs leaders that act like both mothers and fathers to lead people to be like Jesus.

How is a good spiritual leader like a mother?

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. 1 Thessalonians 2:7 (ESV)

Instead of being a greedy, sexually motivated con man who flattered people to get money out of them, Paul claimed he was the exact opposite. He was gentle among them, as gentle as a nursing mother caring for her newborn child.

A good mother is gentle and caring for her children.

Paul begins by saying he was *among them*. That is important. Paul wasn't distant from his people. He was with the people, rubbing shoulders with them. Everyone spoke to him on a first-name basis.

He was gentle with them. He was kind to them. He wasn't abusive, manipulative, exploitative.

But how gentle was he? He gives us a picture to answer that question. He was as gentle as a nursing mother caring for her children. This is the most intimate of human relationships. A mother with her newborn child is the gentlest, tenderest, and most giving of all human relationships. The mother is not trying to use the baby to gain honor for herself. She gives her life for the baby to ensure

its health and success. A good mother is all about her baby. She no longer cares for herself. That is a picture of how Paul cared for the Christians in the church of Thessalonica.

When Paul spoke of a mother *caring* for her children, the Greek word for *care* means to warm with body heat. This is a graphic picture of a mother holding her newborn in her arms, nursing the child for food, and using her own body to protect and warm the defenseless newborn. That is a picture of how a good spiritual leader treats those under his or her care.

A good mother sacrifices her life for her children.

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (ESV)

Paul says we were affectionally desirous of you. This speaks to the kind of bonding and connection that exists between a mother and her children. There are no kudos or awards for being a mom. All you get is crying, runny noses, diapers, sleepless nights, and continual giving of yourself for the next twenty years. Yet a mother gives her life for her baby. That is how Paul says he felt about the new Christians in Thessalonica. He loved them so much that he gave all his life to helping and being with them.

When Paul says he didn't just share the gospel with them, but he gave his very life for them. The Greek word for *life* is the word for soul. Paul says he loved them so much that he gave up his very existence for them like a mother gives her entire life away for the sake of her child. That is unselfish. That is generous.

Some women don't want to have children because they are worried children will ruin their careers, destroy their figure, or hold them back in life. They

are right on all accounts. You can't have a baby and go on living life for yourself. The baby consumes everything and becomes the center of your world. That is how Paul gave his life for the Thessalonian church.

Sometimes, we hear that abortion is wrong except if it means the life of the mother. A godly mother would say, "I will gladly lose my life if it enabled me to save my child's life." That is what a godly mother does.

For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 1 Thessalonians 2:9 (ESV)

This is more about what it means to be a godly mother. Isn't that what a godly mother does? They work hard, night and day, not to be a burden to their children but to bless and help their children. Godly mothers are up early, getting the kids ready for school. They make dinner for the family. They pack lunches. The last thing a godly mother wants is to be a burden to their children.

That is what Paul says he felt like. He didn't want to burden the Thessalonians because, like a good mother, he wanted to love and care for the Thessalonians.

How is a good spiritual leader like a father?

For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12 (ESV)

Just as Paul said, a good leader is like a caring mother who deeply loves people and gives their very life for people; a good leader is also like a father. There are three things the father does in this verse. He exhorts, encourages, and charges children to walk in a manner worthy of God. What does that mean?

A good father offers correction in love.

Exhorting means to come alongside someone to move them in a specific direction. The Holy Spirit comes alongside us and convicts us of sin to move us in a specific direction. In the same way, a good father comes alongside his children, lovingly showing them their sins and errors, then helping them move in a new direction.

As every good father knows, children are different. They need different types of exhortation. All you need to do is look at some children with disappointment, and they break down in tears. I had one of those children. Other children have a strong will. You need to have pointed conversations to bring them back in line. That is part of a father's job.

A good father constantly encourages.

Not only does a good spiritual father correct or move someone toward an action, but they are encouragers. Here, we move from instruction to motivation. A good father comes alongside their child and believes in them. They encourage them when life is hard. I think of when my sons were wrestling. As a father, there was a lot of teaching time, but when things didn't go well on the mat, there was a lot of encouraging time. That is a big part of a father's role.

One time, in high school, David—my oldest son, was deeply discouraged from wrestling. I tried to encourage him, but it wasn't making a difference. Thankfully I have a friend in the EFCA denomination who is an Olympic gold and silver champion wrestler. I gave him a call and asked him to call David on his cell phone to talk him out of quitting the sport. I watched David across the room when

he answered his phone and realized who was on the other end of the line. His eyes were as big as saucers. My friend talked with him for about 15 minutes, telling him about times he wanted to quit and the importance of persevering in hard times. David was ready to return to wrestling practice when he hung up the phone.

Bold acts of encouragement are not just the job of a physical father, but they are also the job of a spiritual father. Elders, pastors, deacons, and other spiritual leaders are to encourage people and believe in people. Life is hard. Everyone needs an encourager, especially in the church.

A good father pleads with his people to honor God.

The last thing a good father does is bear witness to the truth of his words and of God's words. Some translations say a good father charges people to live in the truth. Other translations say a good father testifies to the truth. The idea is a good father will personally motivate, encourage, and share.

Conclusion

This morning, we looked at spiritual leadership, and what good spiritual leadership looks like. Good spiritual leadership begins in the heart. The heart of a good spiritual leader is confident in God's power, committed to the truth, sexually pure, honest, living in light of God's omniscience, and doesn't flatter or manipulate. The life of a good spiritual leader is lived with tender love, care, and sacrifice for those they lead, like a good mother. A good spiritual leader also exhorts and encourages, like a good father.

There is a lot on this list. How do we become better spiritual leaders? It all comes from Jesus and our relationship with him. As he works inside of us, he naturally brings out of us this kind of good leadership.



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