

# Missing Virtues In Gospel Ministry

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[ 0 : 00 ] 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, just two verses this morning, verses 7 and 8, okay? 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.

There's a man who attends our Wednesday morning Bible study group with the men. We call it Men's Advance on 6.30 every Wednesdays when there's not an election on Tuesday nights.

Most people are there on Wednesday morning at 6.30. His name is Larry. Larry, some of you know him. You went to church with him for many years. Larry doesn't belong to our church. He belongs to another church in Huntersville, but he attends our Bible study on Wednesday mornings, and he's a wonderful Christian.

He and Terry always bring an amazing amount of biblical knowledge and wisdom to our discussions, and we all kind of lean on them during those times.

[ 1 : 08 ] He's a faithful Christian. We love having him there. His church is without a pastor right now, and Larry is one of the men that's been tasked with the responsibility of trying to find the next pastor and who the Lord would have and make those connections.

And some of you have been in positions like that before at other churches, and you know how daunting of a task that is. That's not an easy thing. And when you don't have a leadership structure that has a plurality of elders that can kind of shoulder that load, it falls to people in the congregation to do it, and that's a very difficult thing to do.

And Larry's in one of those positions, and a few weeks ago we were chatting about that in our Bible study, and I don't think he was referring to this particular church, but maybe a church years ago in his life where he had been in a similar role, and he mentioned a survey that had been issued to the congregation, basically asking them, what are things that you care about?

What do you want to see in your next pastor? And I got to thinking about that, and I thought, you know, that's an interesting question. I wonder how most Christians, the average Christian, would respond to such a survey.

And so I want you to think about that. Don't answer this out loud. Just ponder it in your head. I don't need my feelings getting hurt right here at the beginning of the sermon. If I asked you to list the qualities you most want in a pastor, what would be on your list?

[ 2 : 34 ] What would headline the list? Maybe three, four, five things. Like, these are the things that matter most, the things I care about most in a pastor. Or maybe we're just thinking in discipling relationships within our church.

Like, if there's going to be somebody that comes and is personally discipling me as a spiritual mentor in my life, these are the qualities that I want them to have. This is how I want them to lead me and help me.

And there are so many ways we can answer that question, right? There's an abundance of good answers that we might have. Most of us would likely begin at the qualifications for a pastor in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and that would be exactly the right instinct to go.

What is the Bible saying a pastor is supposed to be? What is the bare minimum that the scriptures say an elder qualifies a man to be an elder in a church? And that's the right instinct.

That's where we would go, and maybe we would start to fashion our list that way. Other of us may think in more practical terms. We may think about things like education.

[ 3 : 36 ] You know, have they actually been trained theologically so that they're properly prepared to teach us the Bible? We might think about experience. Like, what kind of experience do they have in pastoral ministry?

Are they equipped to do this work? Do they have a leadership ability? Do they have an administrative prowess? Yes. And so long as those things are ordered properly as secondary to the biblical qualifications, those are actually really good things to consider.

We want to have those things on our list, don't we? Then, of course, we get to personality dynamics, which for sure are tertiary issues. But they're still going to show up on some of our list. Probably we want somebody who has a certain kind of charisma, or that might would be on some of your list. Most of what we would put on our list will rightly portray strength and aptitude.

We might even come to a letter like 1 Thessalonians and look at how Paul describes himself here and think, I want whoever is discipling me to be bold, not afraid to speak the truth, even when it's unpopular to do it, even when it's unpopular for me, to me for them to do it.

[ 4 : 52 ] I want somebody who's going to be bold anyway, who's going to give me the truth. And oh, what a almost rare blessing that is to have sometimes in spiritual leadership these days. The point of this exercise, the reason I want you to think about this for this moment, isn't really to think about what would be on your list, but it's after kind of compiling that list, stepping back and observing it and thinking, what might be missing from your list?

I wonder how many of us would have a description that actually matches Paul's here. Look again at verse 7. Now be real honest.

How many of you in your mind, your mental mind, just a moment ago when I was asking that question, how many of you raised your hand if you had maternal affection as one of the qualities on your list? Probably none of us, right?

No one probably thought a minute ago, you know, when I think of someone I want discipling me and pastoring my church, my first thought is that they look like a mom nursing her baby. And yet that's what Paul describes his ministry as, isn't it?

It's quite amazing. What he describes here, it seems to us more like weakness than strength. These qualities even almost seem contradictory to some of the other things that have been displayed in his demonstration of ministry in the letter.

[ 6 : 20 ] Things like the boldness and the courage. And as we continue on in chapter 2 in a couple of weeks, we're seeing exhortation and discipline and all of these things. We think this almost seems backward.

Almost seems like it doesn't fit. But I think not only are the qualities in verses 7 and 8 consistent with a right understanding of the other traits, I want to suggest actually that what's listed for us in verses 7 and 8 are the virtues that get to the very heart of what faithful gospel ministry is.

Each of them is modeled perfectly and instructed explicitly by the Lord Jesus. And I don't want them to be missing in my ministry.

I don't want them to be missing in our ministry to one another as a congregation that endeavors to disciple one another to be faithful to Jesus Christ.

There's three of them here that I want to bring to your attention. First, I want you to see gospel ministry should be gentle. Gospel ministry should be gentle.

[ 7 : 35 ] Again, verse 7, we were gentle among you. Like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. Of course, gentleness in this verse, it's contrasting with the negative features of unfaithful ministry that are listed in verses 5 and 6.

Particularly the last one. Let's just read them together. Look at verse 5. Paul says, 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.

That's the context with which he is now using this transitional word in verse 7. But that's referring back to something else. It's a negative and positive, right? The negative is, this is how we did not come to you.

The positive is, but we were gentle among you, like a mother nursing her own children. Now, when we get to that last phrase in verse 6, Paul says, We could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

[ 8 : 44 ] But he's not saying that he had the right to kind of throw around his apostolic weight and just simply chose not to do that. That's not what he means.

He doesn't mean that it would have been permissible for him to minister in that way, and he just felt like being a nicer guy at the time that he was in Thessalonica. That's not what he means.

He meant that his unique authority as an apostle of Christ made it possible for him to justify spiritual abuse and lord over people in a demanding way.

But that's not the way that he did it. He's essentially saying, look, I could have come in and I could have said, look, Christ called me to this. He personally commissioned me to do this.

Now, you listen to what I say and you do what I tell you to do. He says, I didn't come in like that. I didn't minister to you like that. Instead, he was marked by the gentleness of a nursing mom.

[ 9 : 43 ] Now, I've watched my wife live this out, this illustration, with our three girls. Charlie's seven months. She's about to be eight months old now.

And there's still nights when she gets up. Last night, it wasn't too bad. It was about five o'clock and it was about time to get up anyways. And so it worked out. But there's still nights where she just decides, you know, two o'clock in the morning, I think I'm just going to start screaming my head off. And she does that. And, you know, to this point, after eight months, I've never one time rolled over and looked at Julie and heard her say, you know what, this time, Jared, I'm going to teach this little brat a lesson.

She hasn't done it yet. Why? Because she's gentle with her. I've watched her countless times, actually, approach our girls, even in moments of correction, when she needs to discipline them and she needs to correct them and she needs to steer them in a different way based on the decisions that they've made.

I've watched her countless occasions do that, clothed in the kind of gentleness that seeks to nurture them, not to beat them down. And that's how Paul describes his demeanor toward the Thessalonian Christians.

[ 11 : 03 ] And it should describe the demeanor that we have toward one another and toward the lost world around us. Jesus is the perfect example of it.

In fact, Jesus even describes himself this way in Matthew 11. Remember, when he invited people to come to him, what he said, he said, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.

Meekness. And he says, if you will do that, what you'll find from me is rest for your soul. Rest for your soul. Now, you can't come to Jesus without acknowledging the correction and the discipline of Jesus for your sin.

And yet, the thing that he says is that he's gentle and that when you come, even despite the correction and the discipline and the acknowledgement of our sin and the reality of judgment, what you find is rest.

Why? Because he's gentle and lowly. It's who he is. Gentleness is a virtue that God supplies as we walk in the Spirit.

[ 12 : 13 ] We get that from Galatians chapter 5 and that famous passage about the fruits of the Spirit. We're told very explicitly, the fruit of the Spirit, the things that God does in us through the sanctifying work in his Spirit.

These are the things that he supplies to us. And one of them right in the middle is gentleness. So then we would understand that text to mean that as we are faithfully walking in step with the Spirit, what will be the natural byproduct of that because of his gracious work in us is a demeanor of gentleness toward other people.

Gentleness is required of those who serve as elders in the church. We can go to different places for this. I want to look at 2 Timothy chapter 2 verses 24 through 26.

It's on the screen. You can turn there if you'd like. This is not the qualifications for a pastor. That's 1 Timothy chapter 3. In 2 Timothy chapter 2, Paul is instructing Timothy on how to deal with false teachers in the church, false doctrine in the church.

And listen to what he says. He says, The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind. Kind to everyone.

[ 13 : 33 ] Able to teach. Patiently enduring evil. That's perseverance. And then notice this.

Correcting his opponents with gentleness. And here's what Paul says will happen, what might happen by God's grace, when the elders of the church serve the church, even in correction with gentleness.

He says, God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will.

Not only is it a qualification for elders, but it's actually necessary for effective gospel ministry. You've heard people say, it's not always what you say, it's how you say it. Well, sometimes it's what you say when it comes to the gospel. Sometimes we don't even really get a chance for people to hear us because they can't get past the way that we're saying it. And Paul says, No, the Lord's servant shouldn't be that way.

Correct with gentleness. Gentleness is an essential characteristic of a congregation. That is unified in the gospel and pursuing the work of Christ through mutual discipling.

[ 14 : 49 ] We studied this a few months ago in Ephesians chapter four, the first three verses. Paul says, I therefore urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

And if you remember back to that study, what is that calling? It is the calling of Christ in the gospel that's related to our adoption into God's family. So basically the name to which we have been called to serve and to take on that has been given to us by God is God's name, that we belong to him. And Paul says, I want you to walk in a manner that is worthy of that calling. And how does he say we are to do that? With all humility and gentleness. This is the context of our relationship to one another.

That as we are serving together, as we are doing life together in the context of a covenant in this local church, that the disposition with which we have toward one another in those discipling relationships is characterized by gentleness and humility, bearing with one another in love, patience, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Gentleness is essential to that. Now some clarifications are necessary, aren't they? To be gentle doesn't mean that you avoid telling people the truth about sin and judgment.

[ 16 : 11 ] That's not what gentleness means. Gentleness doesn't forsake correction and discipline. We just quoted several verses where gentleness was paired with correction and discipline.

Gentleness doesn't neglect confrontation. However, gentleness is the spirit-enabled, Christ-mimicking, God-glorifying virtue with which all of our discipling efforts are to be carried out. Whether that be in making disciples through personal evangelism or helping other Christians who have already come to Christ grow more faithful to Christ, our efforts are to be clothed with gentleness.

Our demeanor, even in the most solemn moments of ministry, should be like a nursing mother tending to her child.

Galatians 6. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, this is church discipline here. You who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness, meekness.

[ 17 : 24 ] Now, I want you to think about that. What's the instruction? Church discipline. What is church discipline? Well, when it's carried out to the fullest extent, it includes a congregation coming around someone who is refusing to repent of sin and is dishonoring the name of Christ and showing that they may not even be a true Christian.

And the congregation is saying, we must exercise discipline here as far as your membership is concerned in our church. And yet, Paul says here in Galatians 6 that even when it comes to that, that a spirit of gentleness should pervade that process.

That the goal there is not to hopefully rid ourselves of a pain in the neck, but the goal is to restore them to faithfulness to Christ, and that is to be done through gentleness.

Now, why don't we prize gentleness the way that God does? Why is it that harshness can sometimes be the thing that brings us delight?

Why is it that when we're thinking about that person that really just grades on our nerves and we never fantasize about having an opportunity when they sin against us or do something really annoying against us.

[ 18 : 49 ] We never fantasize about how we can show them love in that moment, do we? What do we do? We drive down the road and this person pops in our mind and we think, you know, I would just love one day for them to say this to me because I'd love to say this back in response.

Harshness. Why do we do that? Why do we value that over the gentleness that God prizes in the scriptures?

And there's only one answer for that. It's indwelling sin. God calls us to gentleness.

Not only should we expect that of those who are in leadership, but we should seek to pursue it personally in the way that we interact with one another and the way that we interact with the world around us.

Gospel ministry should be gentle. Number two, gospel ministry should be affectionate. Affectionate. Look again at verse eight, just the first phrase and then the last phrase.

[ 19 : 49 ] So being affectionately desirous of you and then look at the last phrase, because you had become very dear to us. affection, love, care.

What is it that drives a mother to care for her child? Love. What drove Paul to faithfully minister to the Thessalonians? Love.

Your gospel ministry to the world and your gospel ministry to one another in discipleship will be carried out in direct proportion to your love for others.

I've heard Alistair Begg say so many times to his church in Cleveland and listening to his preaching, he'll say something to this effect, however, I do or do not meet the many expectations that you may have for me as a pastor.

You'll know that I've stopped loving you the way that I should when I cease to preach to you the gospel of Jesus. And I think there's something significantly true about that statement.

[ 21 : 02 ] We minister the gospel to those we love best. Why? Because we recognize that the relationship with Christ is the supreme need of their life. That greater than anything else that they need, greater than any other longing that they have.

What they need is Jesus. What they need is reconciliation with God through the cross of Christ. And those whom we love most are those whom we're most willing to care for in that way.

Why did Paul preach this gospel there? Why did he do it in the midst of so much conflict? He says here, because we love you. But from where does this kind of affection arise?

You see, this is the hard question, isn't it? Because it's not like we can just flip a switch in our hearts and suddenly we just like people. It doesn't work that way. We should work that way. It doesn't work that way, does it?

Some of you might actually really be struggling with this particular thing. You find it difficult to feel affection for the people that God has put in your life.

[ 22 : 12 ] Maybe in relationship to your family. Maybe you just have family members who just like you, you just struggle with them so much and especially when it comes to talking about Jesus and talking about the gospel and things like that and it's just, it's becoming more and more difficult for you to feel any kind of affection for them.

Maybe it's for coworkers or for other relationships that you have. Let's be honest, there's probably some people here or people that are connected to our church at some point that your struggle in discipling in this congregation is a struggle of affection for people that you feel like are difficult for you to even get along with.

So how can we do this? Like how can we just love people like Paul loves people? Well if you were at Laurel last night I touched on this to some extent.

Paul's love for the Thessalonians wasn't based on who they were. It wasn't based on their ethnicity. It wasn't based on gender. It wasn't based on what they could do for him.

It wasn't based on personality. It wasn't based on anything about them. It was based on Christ's love. And we get that from 2 Corinthians chapter 5 when Paul says the love of Christ controls us.

[ 23 : 31 ] The older translations say constrains us. It grips me. Paul says as I think about Christ as I think about the cross as I think about his love it compels me.

It grips my life so that everything that I now do it seems to be an overflow of what I've seen to be true in the Lord Jesus. It was the love of Christ on the cross that compelled him to love others. Indeed the more we gaze at Christ and his cross the more we will be compelled by his love to display his love to other people.

And by the way this is exactly what he taught us. John chapter 13 you know the passage well.

Speaking to his disciples Jesus says a new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you.

He is the example. In other words he is saying if you are trying to figure out Simon the zealot who is one of the disciples with Matthew the tax collector who were mortal enemies if you guys are trying to figure out how to love one another just stop looking at each other for a minute and just look at me.

[ 24 : 48 ] He says the way that I have loved you that is how you need to love one another. And then he makes this really really bold statement Jesus says this is the way that the world will know that you are my disciples.

This is the way that they will know that you belong to me is when you love one another. That's amazing isn't it? Jesus says your love isn't to be based on what you think about each other your love is to be based on what you think about me and what I think about you.

Loved ones. I implore you be so immersed in Christ's love and in the gospel that you cannot help but look at one another and say you are so very dear to me I love you.

Gospel ministry should be affectionate. Thirdly gospel ministry should be self-sacrificing. self-sacrificing.

Self-sacrificing. Look again at the middle portion of verse 8. We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves.

[ 26 : 15 ] Our own selves. John Piper called this mutual soul sharing. Mutual soul sharing.

And it is the essence of congregational life as it's described in the New Testament. All those one another commands that we see in the Bible.

There is a depth of relational commitment that is implicit in the scriptures and explicit in the scriptures. It has to do with the teaching about the church that few people seem ready to acknowledge or pursue.

I read this great statement recently. I think it was Matt Smathers that said it that the church is where quote it's none of your business goes to die.

There is this relational commitment that is implicit and explicit in the scriptures teaching about the nature of the church that involves this intentional affectionate gentle self sacrificing relational commitment to the people that you have chosen to covenant with as a local church.

[ 27 : 37 ] But it is this self sacrificing commitment like that of a nursing mother Paul underscores as the central to his gospel ministry here.

Now it's important to note that Paul wasn't adding something to suggest that gospel proclamation is in and of itself insufficient.

That's not what he's saying. He's not saying that on one hand we have this piece of our ministry that involves gospel proclamation and then on the other hand we have this kind of relational thing where we just like to really love on people and we're hoping that between those two things God might use it.

No it's the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. We know that. Paul believed that. What he means here is he's saying that the way that we shared the gospel of God with you was this way.

He's emphasizing that his ministry to them wasn't cold or distant. It was actually up close. It was warm. It was self-sacrificing soul care.

[ 28 : 45 ] In other words self-sacrifice is the manner with which he shared the gospel with them. That's the way he shared the gospel. By giving of his own self to these people in Thessalonica.

And we see it all through what we've studied so far in the letter. He sacrificed his time and his privacy living and ministering quote among them.

We see it in chapter 1 and verse 5. Our gospel came to you not only in word but in the power of the spirit with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

In other words we lived and ministered. We were with you. We were with you. And we were with you in such a way that you could truly observe our lives and you know us. You know about the nature of our ministry.

And then he says that again here in verse 7. We were gentle among you in the midst of you. sacrificing his time. Sacrificing his privacy in order that he might share the gospel with them and encourage them in the truth of the gospel even after they came to faith.

[ 29 : 56 ] He sacrificed his energy. If you follow along in verse 9 you'll see that he reminds them that he worked night and day as a tent maker to finance his ministry so as not to be a burden to the people or cast doubt on the genuineness of his ministry.

Sacrificed time. Sacrificed privacy. He sacrificed energy. He didn't just give them a sermon. He gave them all of himself in order that he might build them up in Christ.

As we study the rest of the New Testament we find that the Thessalonians imitated him. we see that because of the way that they lived out their own Christian faith.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 Paul reflects on the Macedonian churches and their generosity. He says for they gave according to their means and as I can testify and beyond their means of their own accord.

They were begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. And this not as we expected but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God they gave of themselves to us.

[ 31 : 18 ] Do you see? Paul comes in mimicking Jesus and he gives all of himself to these people in Thessalonica and that catches fire in Thessalonica through the power of the gospel so that the Thessalonians then turn around these Christians and they begin to give of themselves to people who are in ministry giving of themselves to those who are struggling in other places in their generosity.

This isn't only to be true of elders in the church. This must be true of all of us. This giving of ourselves to one another.

This is the essence of congregational life in the Bible. We all expect people to be willing to sacrifice. to meet our needs to some extent. How many of us are willing to sacrifice for the spiritual benefit of others? Now I know you well enough to know that many of you are very willing.

You're prepared. You want to do this. This is not a correction this morning. It's just an edification. But it's worth the analysis, isn't it?

[ 32 : 33 ] Are you willing to sacrifice some time to help someone else know and follow Jesus? Whether that's in an evangelistic way, intentionally developing a relationship with an unbeliever, in order that you might be able to more faithfully share the gospel with them, see them come to Christ?

Are you willing to sacrifice some time just to kind of put your arm around that other lady in our church that may be a struggler, maybe seems to be drifting and just say, hey, can we just spend some time together?

Love on them, encourage them, maybe correct them with gentleness if that's what's necessary. What about this? Are you willing to sacrifice your pride when you're the one that that other person in the church is coming and kind of putting their arm around and saying, hey, why don't we go to coffee this week?

Are you willing to sacrifice your time for correction when you're the one that needs to receive it? It's part of this. It's this vulnerability. It's this affection. It's this self-sacrifice for the good of others and for the glory of Christ in our lives.

Are you willing to lay aside things that you care about if it means being faithful to worship on Sunday? I mean, of course you are. Look at you. You're here. Are you willing to sacrifice things that you care about in order to share the gospel?

[ 33 : 55 ] Are you willing to sacrifice things that you really care about to fund a mission work or encourage a struggling Christian? This is the kind of virtue that we should pursue because it's exactly the virtue that Jesus modeled for us.

It's this humility that Shane mentioned in the Sunday school class this morning. Humility towards others. Isn't that what we find in Philippians 2? Paul says, let each one of you look not only on his own interest.

Oh, it's so easy to do that, isn't it? That's kind of our default setting, right? We're just constantly, we've got like tunnel vision. It's not always that we're trying to ignore other people. It's just we've got tunnel vision.

Like this is all the things that I've got going on in my life. These are all the needs that I have, that I need to be met. These are all the interests that I have in order for my life to work and for my growth to work out just the way that I want it to.

And we start to, maybe even inadvertently, stop to think, start, stop thinking about other people around us. And Paul says, let each of you not only think of his own interest, but on the interest of others.

[ 34 : 57 ] Have this mind among yourselves, and here it is, which was in Christ Jesus. How did Jesus display this? In his humiliation, in his condescension, who though being in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

That is the benefits of being with the Father in heaven, the benefits of being the second person of the divine Godhead. They were not so much him that he was unwilling to put those things aside in order to condescend to us and become a man in order to save our souls.

That's what Paul says. He's in the form of God. He didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped to hold on to at all costs, but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born

in the likeness of men, and being found in human form.

He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. This is the model that Christ has given us.

Self-sacrifice for the good of others. Now these are not the only ways to describe faithful gospel ministry, but I do think it's true that we cannot call our ministry faithful without these three virtues.

[ 36 : 23 ] It's not the only thing. There's more. But we can't take these things away and then still consider ourselves to be faithful in the ministries that God has given us. As we've seen, the key to embracing and possessing them is to know and believe and meditate on the gospel of Jesus.

We talk about this all the time that we preach the gospel to ourselves every day. We live in light of the gospel in every moment. Because the more we gaze at Jesus, the more the spirit works in us to fashion us into his likeness.

And if we are becoming like Jesus as his people, our lives will inevitably be marked by gentleness, affection, self-sacrifice.