

1 Thessalonians Faith

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[0 : 00] What motivates you to do things for other people? A couple of months ago, Alyssa had gone away for the weekend. She'd taken Micah and I was left with the two big kids, Isaac and Tamara.

And I spent hours cleaning the house. And so when Alyssa got home, I was like, look at me. Look at this house. Look at all this cleaning I've done.

I know, and look, these kids are still alive. They've been fed. Even had a play with some other friends. The house was cleaner than it had ever been. Husbands, have you ever tried to pull this thing off?

Maybe not. And the response I was looking for, what I was hoping Alyssa would say was, Oh, James, you are just the best husband ever. Thank you so much for doing this.

You know, you could have just been watching movies with the kids, eating donuts. But you didn't. And I am so indebted to you. Actually, you know, you should take some time off. You're doing a weekend of being a single dad.

[1 : 01] That's been hard for you. So, you know, here's a pat on the head like a puppy. Does anyone think I got that response from Alyssa? I'm not sure if she's in the room to defend herself.

No, she didn't say that. It was probably much shorter. But what motivates you to do things for other people? Is it to be praised like me?

Is it so that people owe you? Maybe you want people to butter you up so that, you know, you want people to think more of you than they really do. Does being a Christian motivate you to love other people?

To serve them and to help them? Or is your motive to try and win God's praise? You know, does God, do you want God to say, oh, you know, you've worked so hard.

Let me bless you more. Is your motive of loving other people to try and make God forget your sin? Are you motivated to help people so that God thinks higher of you than he does currently?

[2 : 05] Today, we're continuing in our series looking at the book of 1 Thessalonians as we think about standing firm. And last week, we saw how Paul and Silas started this church in Thessalonica before they were driven out.

And so Paul sent Timothy and then this letter to care for this new little church. And today, we're looking at the second chapter. And we're going to see what motivated Paul to go to this area, to start this church.

What motivated him to love and to serve these people and to send this letter? So I'm going to pray as we look at God's word for us. Heavenly Father, as we come before your word today, Lord, I ask that you would help us to have minds that are open, hearts that are ready to be challenged, that we would consider our motives, that we would think well, that we would think through your eyes about why we do things, Lord.

We ask that we would do this for your glory. Amen. And so at the beginning of chapter 2, Paul reminds the church of how he came to them. They had suffered, Paul had suffered greatly in Philippi because they'd been sharing the good news.

And they had come to Thessalonica. And Paul writes this big list of how they came, but also how they did not come to them. So please have a look at me, with me at chapter 2, verse 3.

[3 : 35] And if you don't have a Bible open, we can get you one, but it will also be on the screen. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.

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.

You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed. God is our witness. 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. Instead, we were like young children among you. Paul says, we didn't come with error or impure motive. It's not a trick. We're not trying to please people. We're trying to please God. We didn't use flattery. We didn't use greed. We're not looking for praise and fame, which we could have as apostles. [4 : 40] But we came like children. Why is Paul saying this? He's gone to great lengths here. He's taken up a fair chunk of this short book to defend himself.

And the way this church started. Is there people outside the church or even inside the church trying to discredit Paul, saying, oh, that guy, he came with tricks, he came with sleight of hand to try and steal your money and fool you into believing Jesus?

Are people saying that he was a thief going door to door, selling the gospel, setting up churches to steal people's money? Well, it's most likely that Paul was trying to distance himself from other types of people that went around from town to town speaking.

During this time of the first century, there were no movie stars or TV stars, obviously. There were no reality TV stars. There was no singing celebrities like we have in the same way.

The celebrities that they had were philosophers. So think of Aristotle and Plato. They're from a couple of hundred years beforehand. But philosophers were these professional speakers who would go from town to town and they would present new ideas and new thoughts.

[5 : 59] They would speak and use rhetorical tricks and they would try and keep people interested and engaged in order to make people agree with what they said.

They would enter cities with great pomp and ceremony. They would have these giant audiences. They would try and get disciples to follow their teaching. And ancient sources tell us that the thing that motivated these philosophers was money.

It was fame. It was glory. It's not really that different to what motivates people to try and become big. It's fame. It's money. It's glory.

And it makes most sense that Paul is saying he didn't come like one of these philosophers. He didn't come to get fame and glory. He didn't come with impure motive but with the help of God.

He did not come with tricks like a motivational speaker or a TED talk designed to emotionally influence people but he came with the good news of Jesus.

[7 : 04] He didn't come flattering people so that they would like him more. He didn't come with the purpose of gaining money. They didn't come to be praised. He didn't come so that at the end of him speaking there would be thunderous applause.

Make sure you don't do that this morning. I know you weren't going to anyway just to check. They didn't come to get fame and glory but as apostles Paul had met Jesus himself and there is no higher claim than to say that he had met God.

Instead they came like children and so instead of coming to get fame and glory the end of the chapter verse 20 says you are our glory and our joy.

That word glory it's not the usual word glory in reference to God. The word glory here is more like fame. So Paul and Silas didn't come to Thessalonica to get fame and glory for themselves.

They came to get the Thessalonians. They are the fame and the glory they wanted. Paul didn't come with impure motives.

[8 : 15] He didn't come influenced by pride or greed or a desire for praise. I wonder do these things influence our motives?

Even when it comes to serving people at church or loving others during the week. What are our motives influenced by? We as a church value radical generosity and we want to also have a local impact.

Imagine if Toys and Tucker is coming up towards the end of the year. Is anybody aware of Toys and Tucker? Yes? Good. Some of you? If not, let me tell you what Toys and Tucker is.

It's where we give to others out of what God has given us. So in particular toys and food, tin food, other food to share with other people.

And because we want to have the biggest impact, imagine that we as a church devised a little competition. Imagine that we said, okay, we wanted to fill the stage with food and so what we're going to do is we're going to compete with our services.

[9 : 20] We're going to see which congregation can bring the most food. So we're going to compare 9.30 and 4 o'clock. Now, who do you think is going to win? I heard someone say 9.30.

Shame on you for saying that. But imagine that we say this because we want to have a big impact. We want to have a big local impact. We want to care for people. We want to be radically generous. And so we compete with each other. You know, 9.30's got to beat 4 o'clock. You know, 9.30 we're going to say, come on, let's beat them. We don't want to let those young people at 4 o'clock beat us.

And they're going to be saying, oh, we don't want to let those families and old people and other people. We don't want to let those people beat us. And so we all have to go and spend lots of money and bring it in.

It's a little bit extra motivation to be generous. It's a bit extra motivation to show love. But we're all sinful. And there's some of us that are highly competitive.

[10 : 21] And so, you know, there's, I'll pick on Nick. There's Nick, and he's down at Woolies, filling up trolley after trolley, because, do you know what, he really wants 9.30 to win, because, you know, his kids are encouraging him to.

And so, what has gone from being generous, it's now pride and arrogance. And, you know, there's people at 4 o'clock, well, they don't want to let these kids beat him, and so, they're filling up trolley, they're buying toys after toys.

And all of a sudden, what was initially about serving and being generous and showing the love that God has shown us, we're stuck with a motivation of pride and a desire for fame and glory.

That's what happens when we don't stand firm in faith, hope, and love. Are we guilty of the same thing? It's a question of motivation.

Why are we nice to people? Why do people serve morning tea? Why do I lead a community group? Why are you wearing a snazzy red vest this morning? Why were those people wearing those wonderful high-vis vests out in the rain this morning?

[11 : 32] Maybe that one's not about the glory, maybe they are just serving in the rain. Why do we do what we do? One of the core values of our church is servant leadership, that the heart of the church is the service of God and others, selfishly nourishing others, pastoring and equipping and loving others.

It's character over skills. We need to answer the why of what we're doing before we can answer the what question.

We're to serve God with all of our life, and there are many ways to serve one another, particularly here at church. And some of them do need to be aware of getting more fame than others.

I'll pick on Nick again, musicians on stage. It's very easy to say, oh, Nick Freestone, your voice is like that of an angel. No?

Okay, sorry, mate. To say, who was playing guitar this morning? Nick, your guitar skills bring tears to my eyes. hearts. How do we do this kind of thing all the time?

[12 : 41] How does Nick respond? How does other Nick respond when we say these kinds of things? Do they say, yes, I do sound like an angel, don't I?

Or would they be saying something like, yes, God has gifted me and I'm so pleased I can serve you and the church? We need to continue to check our heart and our motives to make sure there isn't praise creep, to make sure that fame isn't creeping into our motivations.

What may have started out years ago with the best of intentions may have become an idol, our God that brings us pleasure and joy and happiness. How bad would it be to realize in years time that instead of serving at church for God's glory to build his kingdom, we've been building our own kingdom, getting praise for us, which is fickle and will all come tumbling down.

So Paul has showed us how he came and how he did not come. He didn't come with impure motives. And he shows us now a bit more about how he did come to Thessalonica.

Have a look at verse 7, the second half of verse 7 with me. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you, because we loved you so much.

[14 : 07] We were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well. 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 to you.

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,

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

One of the things I've really loved about spending time in 1 Thessalonians is seeing how much Paul really loves these people. He uses the most intimate language.

He refers to himself as a nursing mother, caring for her own children. This was a time where the people that had financial resources, they would have a nursing mother.

They would get a wet nurse so they wouldn't have to feed their own child. So they would get a wet nurse to look after their baby. But Paul hasn't come like a wet nurse to look after someone else's baby.

[15 : 14] He's like a wet nurse looking after his own child. It's not a financial transaction. It's not something that Paul had to do just because God had sent him there.

Paul and Silas loved these people so much and they were delighted to share their lives with them. Paul didn't just come and get up and preach on the Sabbath, maybe visit a couple people during the week and have tea.

He shared with them the gospel but his life. Again, Paul didn't come like the professional speakers, coming and staying in five-star hotels, maybe coming down and seeing the people to sign a few autographs.

He gave the message but his life as well to the church. Paul came like a father, encouraging, comforting and urging the people to live lives worthy of God.

And as we saw last week and again today, Paul and Silas came and shared the gospel in the midst of intense persecution, this persecution that eventually led them to be run out of town.

[16 : 22] Paul continues this intimate family language, verse 14. 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.

Brothers and sisters, you suffered the same thing as everyone else. They suffered persecution just like the Jews who'd become Christians.

He doesn't explicitly state it, but it's likely that some people were persecuted by their families, possibly even kicked out by their families.

And when people are forced to leave a family, Christianity has the unique gift of being able to welcome them into a new family, one that has close relationships, brothers and sisters from every tribe, every race, every tongue.

It's one of the things we've been celebrating here today, that we are transcultural, that this family comes from all places. And it's so important that this new family starts.

[17 : 34] And it's not just cousins, but it's intimate relationships that Paul is celebrating here with the church. There was a Lifeline study done a couple of years ago that said that 80% of people thought that loneliness was increasing.

We are increasingly connected through technology, but we are also increasingly disconnected from the people around us. Even sitting in a crowd of people like here at church today or at a party, we can feel profoundly alone, whether married or single, whether you have many friends or not.

And Paul gives us an antidote to loneliness. He delighted to share his life with people. He delighted to share his life. Is church just the place that you visit on a Sunday?

Is it just where you come to, to spend some time with God and then leave? I love doing church with all of you on a Sunday, but that's only part of what church is.

It has to go beyond Sunday. It has to even go beyond community groups or Bible studies as we meet in the week. Maybe you're thinking to yourself, well, yeah, I can only come on Sundays.

[18 : 54] I can't even make community groups. I'm really busy. There's too many things going on in my life right now. I don't have the energy for it. Paul was trained as a Pharisee, and yet he also had a trade as a tent maker.

And so he took this trade around with him. He had a job that he worked around the church, the people, his dearly loved family that he delighted in. His job worked around what he was doing in the church.

How often do we chase our job, our career, our future, the future of our kids, based on what we want? And then we fit church around that.

For Alyssa and I, we were faced with a tough decision in January of this year. We had an opportunity to take up a job with a really great church, with a great team, and a great boss and

mentor as well.

It's you guys, I'm talking about you guys, if you didn't know. Sorry, I was being a little bit too subtle there. But there was a cost. There was a cost to our family to come back and rejoin this church family that we loved from the year we'd spent here in 2014.

[20 : 11] A cost would be that we would have to leave our church family at St. Aidan's, but we would also have to move a lot further away from our families. Our families live in Wollongong.

Most of them live there. And so moving here is twice the distance. Depending on a day with traffic and weather, we are a long way away from our family.

We are not the only ones that have made ministry decisions to be further away from family. But moving here would mean that we were further away from our family, that we wouldn't get to see them as much as we wanted to, that our kids wouldn't get to see their grandparents and cousins as much.

And it was painful for us. things. But it's also a joy that we could rejoin our family here at St. Paul's. It was a decision to move away from our personal family, but to rejoin this church family that we loved and missed and longed to be with again.

And so we don't just want this to be a Sunday thing. We could have commuted from an hour away if it was just a Sunday thing. We don't want to just see you once or twice a week.

[21 : 29] We want to delight in sharing our lives with you, our kids' lives as we share the gospel. Was it painful leaving our church and moving away from family?

Yes, it was. But we have family here too. At least there is a group of people that could be a family together. The Apostle Paul has bared his soul as he delighted to share his entire life and gospel with the church.

He defended the way that he came and shared the gospel and served them. Paul was motivated by Jesus' model. Jesus didn't come for fame or to gain glory or fortune, but he valued us over his own life.

And so Paul imitates Jesus valuing what God values, valuing other people. So let me encourage you, know that other people are made in the image of God.

They are worth loving and serving. You shouldn't need a motivation of pride and glory to love and serve other people. It is who we are to be.

[22 : 47] Be challenged to share your life with people so that you can say with Paul that people are your delight. And when you serve, watch out for that praise creep, that fame creep, that just ever so gently creeps into the way we serve and love other people.

Serve people and God out of love, but not for profit. Let me pray. Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, you have loved us so much.

Your Son, Jesus, served us so much that he valued us above his own life. Heavenly Father, help us to be motivated by the same thing.

Lord, help us to be radically generous. Lord, help us desire to have an impact here with your gospel. help us desire to share our lives with people as Paul did, not for our glory, but for yours, Lord.

Father, we long to be motivated not for ourselves, but to see your kingdom grow. Help us to check our hearts and change our hearts, Lord, so that we can grow more like your Son every day.