

Living with your (spiritual) parents * 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13
May 12, 2024 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I'm going to do something a little different this morning.

Normally, I get up here and open the Bible and talk about what it means for you; this morning, I'm going to get up here and open up the Bible and talk about what it means for me. I'm going to talk about what it means to be a pastor and that leads very naturally into a discussion about what followers of Jesus should expect from their pastors.

Maybe you've never thought about that before. What should you expect from your pastors? What should pastors be like as they minister to the congregation? Maybe you just kind of think 'A pastor's going to pastor; they are what they are.'

And yet we all know that there are pastors out there who aren't very pastoral. Many of you have had difficult experiences with pastors; is that just the way it is or is there some kind of standard that pastors should strive for? I would argue that there is and that's what we're going to look at today.

So join me in 1 Thessalonians 2, starting in verse 1 and we're going to talk about what you should expect from pastors, what you should expect from me and others who minister as servants of God.

Now, 1 Thessalonians 2 starts off with Paul reflecting on his time pastoring in Thessalonica. Think back to Acts 17 again – Paul and Silas showed up in Thessalonica and started talking to people about Jesus. Those people believed in Him, they became His followers and Paul built them up into a church. He pastored them for at least a few months. And then the town officials cracked down on them and kicked Paul and Silas out of town.

To some, that might have seemed like an epic fail. But not to Paul. 1 Thessalonians 2:1:

NIV 1 Thessalonians 2:1 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure.

Paul's time in Thessalonica was not a failure because Paul could now call these people brothers and sisters. It was not a failure because these brand new Thessalonian believers had turned from sin to serve the living and true God (v. 1-9) and to enjoy eternal fellowship with Him. That was huge win in Paul's eyes, even if it was a costly win.

Verse 2, Paul continues - 2 We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.

'Suffered and insulted' he says. He's kind of underselling the reality there. When was in Philippi, proclaiming the Good News about Jesus, he and Silas were beaten and flogged and

thrown into jail (Acts 16:22-24). They suffered alright. But then God intervened, broke them out of jail and sent them on their way to Thessalonica.

And then guess what they did there? They did it all over again – they dared to tell the Thessalonians about the gospel in spite of strong opposition.'

Now I want to camp on that for a minute because that's very important for our discussion this morning. Look again at verse 2 – 'With the help of our God, we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.'

Whose Gospel/good news is it that Paul is sharing? It's God's. It's God's message they were sharing.

Whose power and authority did Paul use to share that message? It's God's. 'With the help of our God, we shared the gospel in spite of strong opposition.' Just because they faced opposition didn't mean they'd give up sharing the message; they just dusted themselves off, pressed deeper into God and went on to the next town.

You know what that means about Paul and Silas, right? They were messengers. They were going from town to town to share the news that GOD had commissioned them to tell. When they rolled up into a new city, they weren't promoting their own ideas or their own agenda; they were messengers with a mandate to share a message on behalf of God. They shared the message that Jesus had come to seek and save the lost.

And not only did they share God's message; they shared God's message in a way that reflected God's character.

Verse 3 - 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.

4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness.

6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else... (1Th 2:6 NIV).

As Paul and Silas shared God's message, they did it as God's messengers, sincere and genuine and committed to sharing the truth of the Gospel the way God intended, even if it cost them. Because ultimately, they're not accountable to people but to God.

Are you old enough to remember snake-oil salesmen? They'd ride into town with great fanfare, open up their wagons into a stage and then start singing the virtues of whatever they were selling.

That didn't just happen a hundred years ago; that happened in Paul's time; people would travel from town to town, promoting their teachings and gaining followers and making a living hawking the secrets of universe.ⁱ Of course, everybody knew that these people were frauds. They were just in it for the money and once they'd made a quick buck off the locals, they'd skip town and find some new suckers to squeeze.

But not Paul. Not Silas. When they showed up in Thessalonica, their faces were still swollen from the beatings they'd suffered in Philippi. Their clothes were still torn and bloodied. And that went a long way to proving that he wasn't in it for the money. He was committed to the message.

He wasn't trying to trick people or pull the wool over their eyes; he wasn't trying to flatter them into opening up their money bags; he was simply sharing the message that he had to share – that God had made a way for them, sinners though they were, to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, by Jesus' blood. Paul was a faithful messenger.

And this I think is the first thing you should expect of your pastor. A pastor should be a faithful messenger.

See, what set Paul apart from the charlatans and frauds that roamed the roads of the ancient world is that he wasn't in it for himself. Verse 4 – he spoke as someone that God entrusted with the Gospel. Verse 6 – they were not looking for praise from men; they were looking for praise from God who tests their hearts, who held them accountable.

I think that verse 2 is really telling – 'with the help of our God we dared to tell you **HIS** gospel.'

Paul wasn't in it for himself; he was in it for the Lord, compelled to share HIS gospel, His good news about Jesus with whoever would listen and that made him into a faithful messenger.

And that should be true of pastors too. When a pastor gets up in the pulpit and talks about politics or social trends or their own pet interests, they're not presenting the message that God has entrusted to them. When they try to please people or deceive them or trick them, they are not acting like the representatives of God that they should be. When they do it for greed or glory or status, they are failing in a very basic way.

My job as a pastor is to be a faithful messenger of the Gospel. Not preaching my own pet projects, not seeking my own wealth or glory; my job is to faithfully present the reality that Jesus came to seek and save the lost and to help you to live as people who have been found.

So that's the first thing that you should expect from your pastors - a pastor should be like a faithful messenger, faithfully passing on the truth of the Gospel to all who will listen.

Let's keep going in the text – verse 6 again –

6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you,

7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.

8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

9 Surely you remember, brothers, 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.

I think that this is just such a beautiful passage. Remember, Paul spent at least a couple months with the Thessalonian believers; how does he describe his ministry to them? 'We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.' 'We worked hard, day and night, so that we would not be a burden to you while we shared the Gospel with you.'

It is Mother's Day so I think it's fitting that I get to honour my mom here a little bit. My mom was like 'the archetypal mom.' I remember thinking as a kid, 'boy, it's so cool that mom loves cooking and cleaning and watching the oven and washing the dishes;' it's only now that I'm realizing that she probably doesn't LOVE doing dishes but she does it because it has to be done. But I do think she loves cooking because it's a very tangible way to care for your family.

And not just that. Mom was the one who took me to get my first pair of glasses. Mom was the one who first talked to me about depression. Mom was the one who made sure we were making our lunches for school and getting out the door in clean clothes and pouring the iodine on our scratches and bandaging them with love.

Paul says this is what pastors should be like, caring for their people like a mother cares for her children, gentling ministering to people who've been affected by the realities of life.

A pastor should be like a caring mother. I love verse 8 – 'we loved you so much that we were delighted to share not only the Gospel of God with you, but our lives with you as well, because you had become so dear to us.' Did you know that next week it will be nine years since my first Sunday here and I have tried to share not just the Gospel but my life with you?

This is not like a coffee shop relationship where you give me money and I give you a double-double and never think of you again; you are constantly on my mind and on my heart. I want to be with you through the thick and thin of life, celebrating the joys with you, mourning with you through the sorrows, carrying you spiritually when you can't do it yourself. I'm convinced that one of the reasons you accepted me so quickly is that within my first six months here, there were three big funerals and after those you subconsciously said 'he's going to honour our loved ones; we can trust him with the rest.' I hope that you sense that - that I care deeply for you and for your spiritual well-being and for your growth as a person.

I try to pastor like a caring mother and I think that you should expect that from all pastors – you should expect a pastor to serve their flock like a caring mother.

So, a pastor should be like a faithful messenger, a caring mother – let’s keep going,

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

Again, Paul was not worldly or greedy or deceitful when he was with the Thessalonians; he was holy, righteous and blameless, above reproach in all his interactions with the believers. That should be true of all pastors.

11 For you know that we dealt with [treated] each of you as a father deals with his own children,

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

Paul says ‘a pastor should be like a caring mother’ and then he switches gears and says ‘a pastor should also be like a father in his interactions with his children.’

Now this is really interesting because I struggled to find the right word here and I really struggled. Like, what word would you use to describe a mother? Loving, caring, nurturing. What word would you use to describe a father?

Words to describe a mother

From sources across the web

Love	▼	Intelligent	▼	Beautiful	▼
Brave	▼	Selfless	▼	Strong	▼
Caring	▼	Guide	▼	Inspiring	▼
7 more ▼					Feedback



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<https://byjus.com> > English > English Grammar

Adjectives for Mother

Some **adjectives** that **describe** a **mother** are loving, compassionate, endearing, kind, protective, strong, extraordinary, intuitive, caring and mindful. Q2. What ...

- begetter.
- daddy.
- origin.
- pa.
- padre.
- papa.
- pop.
- progenitor.

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Words To Use

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Words for Father's Day

Words for Father's Day · fraternal · fun · funny · generous · gentle · giving · grateful · great; guiding; handsome; handy; hardworking; helpful; hilarious ...

In the ancient world, all of the words they used to describe fathers would revolve around the ideas of teaching and training and equipping and forming morally upright citizens – that was dad’s job – and so I’m going to borrow from that to say that a pastor should be like a formative father – a father who plays a formative role in shaping their children’s life for good. And that’s reflected by the words that Paul uses to describe how he treated them in a fatherly way.

They encourage, comfort and urge you to live lives worthy of God. Or maybe your Bible says exhort, encourage and charge (ESV) or pleading, encouraging, even demanding (Living Bible).

There’s a fair bit of overlap in these words, but I think we can pull out the nuances. Let’s think about them by means of examples.

When I was a kid, riding the hay wagon and pulling bales off the baler, my instinct was to just stick them all in a row, like a KitKat. I remember my dad, who was also riding the wagon, saying ‘No, no, you can’t do that because if you get five bales stacked up in a column on the edge of a wagon, they’re all just going to fall off. This is what you need to do’ and he taught me this alternating pattern – one parallel to the wagon and four perpendicular to it. That’s how you stack a wagon.

That's the first word – as a father teaches and equips his children, a pastor encourages and exhorts his people, teaching the truths of the Gospel and how to live in light of them.

The second one – when I had my tonsils out, it was a real mess – long and the short of it they didn't seal the wound right and so I rode to London with a bucket of blood in my hands. When I got onto a hospital bed, I was pretty terrified but my dad came and held my hand tightly and somehow the roughness, the strength of it gave me confidence that it would be ok.

That's the second word – as a father comforts his children and gives them a sense of security and confidence in his presence, so a pastor comforts and strengthens his flock in difficult times, say like in persecution or a worldwide pandemic.

And the last one – I talked a couple weeks ago about a power take off shaft on a tractor. I think that there are protective sleeves now that you can get for them but when I was a kid, they were just out in the opening spinning around faster than you could react and I remember my dad very clearly saying 'DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES get near that thing when it's running!' He knew someone whose overalls got caught in one and it didn't turn out well and so it is engrained in me – take that thing seriously; don't mess around with it.

That's the third word – as my dad urged me not to fool around with the PTO, I want to urge you not to fool around with the gospel. Take it seriously because it is a tremendous gift that God has given us.

It all boils down to this – God Himself has made the way for you to become His child, to live in His Kingdom, to experience His glory – that's the Gospel message that I'm commissioned to deliver – AND - I need to equip you to live lives that reflect the wonder and privilege of being children of God. My job is not primarily to make sure that Sunday morning happens; from God's point of view, my job is to help you to live lives that reflect the glory of God and the profound gift that God has given. I need to help you to live lives that are worthy of the gospel.

Sometimes that means I encourage you, I teach you. Sometimes it means I comfort you and strengthen you. Sometimes it means I need to get up here and say 'Guys, what are we doing here? Do our actions reflect that grandeur of the blessings that God has given to us?'

A pastor should be like a formative father, helping their people to live lives to the glory of God.

So, what should you expect from your pastors?

You should expect that your pastors will be like faithful messengers, caring mothers and formative fathers.

Now obviously, this is going to look different for every pastor. Different temperaments and personalities will have an impact on how pastors pastor, but I think that Paul sets out for us an objective standard to which pastors need to strive.

A pastor needs to be faithful in his presentation of the Gospel. A pastor needs to be caring in his interactions with his people. A pastor needs to have a formative impact on his people's lives. Drop any one of those off the list and I think you're worse off for it.

You should expect that your pastors will be like faithful messengers, caring mothers and formative fathers.

Let me just give you two quick thoughts to wrap up on what this means for you.

1. What if your pastor is not faithful, caring or formative? Good question. I think that if you're in leadership, you need to gather the leadership together and sit down with the pastor and say 'We love your teaching, we love the way you shape us, we're just not sure you care about us.' Or 'You are like a mother to us and a father to us but we could really use more input from our Heavenly Father.' And maybe the pastor just needs to think about that – maybe they think they ARE caring or formative or whatever and you just need to work that out. If you're not in leadership, talk to the people who are.

2. I present this to you with a little trepidation because this verse can definitely be abused; in fact, I suspect that it probably has in situations like this, but I'd like you to hear it because it's on a loop in my head. Hebrews 13:17 - 17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. [That! I take that very seriously.] Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb 13:17 NIV).

It IS a joy to be here. So pray for your pastors. It can be hard to hold these together, especially when everybody and their mother has an idea about how you should be doing things but I think that it's the standard that we should strive for as pastors – to be faithful like a messenger, caring like a mother and formative like a father. Let's pray.

¹ Gene Green makes this point in his *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Pillar), 113.