

The Marks Of A Model Minister (Part 2)

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

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I want to read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12. Paul says, “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

We are looking at the marks of a model minister. In chapter 1, we saw the marks of a model church. That church is the elect, that church is evangelistic and that church is living in expectant hope of the coming again of Jesus Christ.

But it's a sad thing that today in our culture there is such confusion about what a minister is to be and to do. Like the church, we need to get back to the pattern of the Bible. What a novel thought that the church should be Biblical. We shouldn't take our cues from the world. We shouldn't take our cues from the business world. We should take our cues from the Scripture. God has given us in His Word, the Bible, the pattern for the church.

So what is the church to be and to do? The answer is in the Word of God. And what is the minister supposed to be and to do?

Many years ago the evangelical church started this secret, sensitive, user-friendly kind of concept of ministry in which they took a business model of the world and applied it to leadership in the church in order to grow the church. The shift became not Biblical but pragmatic, what works. It doesn't matter if it isn't Scriptural. It doesn't matter if it isn't Biblical. It doesn't matter if it isn't God's pattern. It grows a big church. The goal began to be a large church rather than a healthy, Biblical church. I believe if the church is a Biblical church, it will grow on the foundation of God's Word. So we need to look to the Bible for our pattern of ministry.

The primary thrust of this passage is about the minister. It's about the ministry of Paul. But it also applies to the general ministry of everyone. I believe every member of the church is to be a minister. So we all can apply these truths to our lives in serving others and ministering God's Word to them.

Paul uses three metaphors, in verses 1-12, for the minister. He uses the metaphors of a steward, a mother and a father.

Last time we saw the metaphor of a steward, in verses 1-6. In verse 4, Paul said, “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.” God entrusted them with the Gospel, and they were stewards of it. They were to faithfully preach and proclaim it; not to add to it or to take away from it or to substitute it. They were to faithfully preach God’s Word. So the primary responsibility of a pastor or minister is to be a steward of the trust of God’s Word, and he is to faithfully dispense it to the people of God or the household of God.

Now, in verses 7-12, we discover two more metaphors. We move from the faithful steward to the mother and the father. It’s very fascinating in that the pastor becomes a parent. So first the pastor is a steward, faithfully preaching God’s Word, then the pastor is a parent, nursing the little child as a mother and teaching and training the children as a concerned father.

I want you to note that Paul is defending his ministry from critics. The reason Paul says what he says in these verses is because he was being attacked by unbelieving Jews. They were trying to discredit him, his ministry and his message. You destroy Paul’s character and you destroy the message and content he’s preaching.

Paul was not so much concerned about defending himself as he was to defending the Gospel he preached. He wasn’t worried about what people thought of him, but he didn’t want their view of him to tarnish the Gospel or affect the message the messenger brought. So four times in verses 1-12, Paul makes reference to “the Gospel” or “the Gospel of God.”

The first metaphor or picture is that of a gentle mother, verses 7-8. Paul said, “We were gentle...”—there it is—“...among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” Paul is speaking of his love and gentleness among them.

If the key feature of the steward is faithfulness, the chief mark of a mother is gentleness. A steward is to be faithful, and a mother is to be gentle. When you think of a mother nursing her baby, you think of her gentle love and her bonding with her child.

What Paul’s critics may have been saying at this point is that Paul didn’t really love them. They were saying Paul’s ministry was in vain, it didn’t produce fruit, it wasn’t effective, it wasn’t real. And they were saying that if Paul loved them, he would have stayed, he wouldn’t have run off while he was being persecuted. So this is why Paul will go on to defend his action of being driven from them, in chapter 3. But now Paul was saying that he wanted them to remember that when they were with them, they were with the Thessalonians in gentleness, “as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” So Paul was an apostle, yet he used his authority with gentleness and with love.

There is an intended contrast between verses 6 and 7. In verse 6, Paul said, “Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands...”—or

“been burdensome”—“...as apostles of Christ.” In other words, they could have been authoritarian, ruled over them and could have expected or even demanded that the Thessalonians support them in the ministry, but they did not. They didn’t want to be burdensome.

Now, in verse 7, Paul said, “But...”—here’s the contrast—“...we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” So Paul and his coworkers were not “lording it” over them.

Years ago there was kind of a “lordship” thing that went through the church, where the pastor became the ruler over the church, and you had to go to the pastor to get every decision made by him—what car do I buy, what house do I buy, who do I marry, what do I do with my life? The pastor would control those decisions.

Hey, I don’t even know what shoes to put on in the morning! Don’t ask me those questions, because I’m not going to try to rule your life. Jesus is your Lord. Let Him lead you and guide you.

So Paul is saying that instead of being demanding and expecting the Thessalonians to support them, Paul and the others were actually giving to them in gentleness.

This picture is somewhat obscure in the King James translation, where it says, “as a nurse cherisheth her children.” That literally is a picture of a mother nursing her own children. From the Greek and the grammar, it is made clear that it means “a nursing mother” who nurses not only children but “her own children.” This is not a hospital nurse in a maternity ward taking care of other people’s babies; this is a mother with her own child, nursing it tenderly and gently.

So this picture of the pastor is kind of interesting. Paul, this man’s man, this apostle of God, says that they actually were gentle among them, as “a nursing mother” with her “own children.”

The picture of a nursing mother is broken down in the text with several words. Paul uses the word “gentle” or “gentleness.” Some translations have “infant,” but in the context, I believe the word itself is referring to “gentleness.” Unfortunately, some translations say they were “babies among you.” But then Paul switches and says, “And then we nursed you.” But the concept is from the idea that they were gentle as a mother with her very own children. So what a beautiful picture of love and gentleness.

And this is a metaphor for the minister. He is to be like a nursing mother, marked by gentleness. The NASB renders this “tenderly cares for.” That is found in the word “cherishes.” The word “cherish” means “to warm with body heat.” It is used in Ephesians 5:29 where it says the husband “nourishes and cherishes” his wife, “just as the Lord does the church.” So just as the Lord nourishes and cherishes the church, the husband is to nurture and cherish his wife.

So basically it is giving a very loving and affectionate picture of a minister. It speaks of tenderness and caring. It is used in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 22:6, in the Septuagint,

where it uses the same Greek phrase of warming with body heat. It is used of a mother bird who warms her baby birds with her body heat.

The second descriptive term is in verse 8. It is affectionate. They were “affectionately longing for you.” The word “affection” speaks of being tenderly yearning or desiring them. It speaks of a continuous, ongoing love for them. The end of verse 8 says, “You had become dear to us.” They were like a nursing mother in that they were gentle, they cherished them and they were affectionate to them.

A story is told by D.L. Moody, the great American evangelist, that when he opened the Y.M.C.A. and he went downtown Chicago to reach the rough, street boys, they came by the hundreds to hear him. Someone inquired of a young boy, “Why would you go to listen to this man to preach to you at the Y.M.C.A.?”

He answered, “Because they really love you over there.”

That’s really what a minister is supposed to do. It doesn’t do any good to preach to people if you don’t love people. “I’m a pastor, there are all these people, but I don’t really like any of them. I just get paid, I just do my job, it’s very cold, it’s very professional and then I go home.” A pastor is to love God’s people, and it’s pictured in a mother nursing her very own baby. What a beautiful picture that is.

So the Thessalonians were born into God’s family, Paul became their spiritual father and he was affectionately, compassionately ministering to them the Gospel of God.

Also it is a willing sacrifice when a mother nurses her own baby. Verse 8 says, “We were well pleased to impart to you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own lives.” Their “own lives” meant their own personalities, their own souls, their very own inner beings. They were willing to impart all that to the Thessalonians. They not only received the Gospel, they received their very lives. Not only did Paul and his coworkers preach the Word of God, they gave the Thessalonians their very lives. And notice that they were “well pleased” to do that. So Paul, Silas and Timothy gave not only the Gospel but their own souls. They didn’t have any cold professionalism. It was loving, willing and sacrificial service.

I want to give you a couple of lessons from this image or metaphor of a nursing mother.

I must confess I’m a little uncomfortable talking about nursing babies, because I’ve never done that—for obvious reasons. But my wife has and my daughters have. My children and grandchildren have all been nursed that way, so I know a thing or two about a nursing mother.

First of all, it takes sacrifice. You can’t just heat a formula and hand the bottle to a babysitter and say, “See you later.” If the baby’s hungry, and you’re nursing, there is only one person who can meet that need. You have to be there, be involved and be connected.

It really speaks to the absent pastor who wants to preach and then run from the people. We

have a lot of multi-campus churches today that are very popular where the pastor is in one location, and the people are in another location. They watch him on the big screen. That's not a Biblical concept. The Biblical concept is that the pastor is present with the people. Not only is the pastor a shepherd, which is another metaphor, but he, too, is a sheep. The pastor has sheep needs just like the congregation. I need your love, your care and your rapport and I need the family of God. And you need me. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. So the pastor is to live among the people. All through this passage, Paul makes reference to "among you" and "you know." He lived among them, and they knew him.

So a mother has to sacrifice. They have to watch what they eat when they are nursing a baby. If you eat hot tamales, the baby may not sleep that night. He may be dancing around in his crib. You may have to sacrifice eating some things you'd like to eat.

Secondly, it takes time and patience. When you go to nurse your baby, you can't say, "Come on. This has to be quick. Hurry up! I only have 10 minutes." To pastor the people of God and the family of God, it takes time and patience. A pastor has to be patient, has to give of himself, just like it takes time to raise a baby.

Thirdly, a nursing mother loves and protects her child. There is an interesting story in 1 Kings 3, when wise King Solomon had two mothers come to him with one baby. The story was that one mother's baby died in the night. She awoke and found her baby dead, so she secretly changed her dead baby for another woman's live baby. When the other mother woke up in the morning and found the baby dead, she looked closely and realized it was not her baby. So both mothers went to the King for him to decide which mother was the mother of this baby. The King then said, "Bring me a sword. We will cut the baby in half and give each mother half of the baby. That will settle it."

The true mother objected and said, "No! Please don't do that! Give her the baby." Solomon realized that this was the real mother of this baby. The other mother was actually crazy and said, "Yes, that's a great idea." So it was obvious who the real mother was. A mother loves and protects her baby or child at all costs. It's natural for her to do that.

So the pastor has love for the people of God.

Chuck Smith used to tell his Calvary Chapel pastors that your congregation should be the best-loved and best-fed church in the whole area. That has always been my goal—not only to feed you the Word of God but to love you with the love of God.

Paul said that they gave the Thessalonians "our own lives" or "our own souls" it says in the King James translation. How important that is. The pastor must live among his people and love them with the love of Christ.

The second metaphor or picture is of a concerned father, verses 9-12. "For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly

and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

Notice in verse 11, it says, “as a father does his own children.” So in verse 7, we have a nursing mother, and now in verse 11, we have a concerned father. The minister is a faithful steward, a gentle mother and a concerned father.

The picture of a concerned father conveys a father’s wisdom and counsel. 1 Corinthians 4:15 says, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” It’s interesting that Paul says he is his father, that he has actually begotten him. He uses the two metaphors in one verse. He says, “I have begotten you through the Gospel, and I am your father, though you have 10,000 teachers or instructors.”

In our text, Paul points out three, important activities that characterize his ministry as a spiritual father. The first activity is hard working, verse 9.

Paul says, “You remember.” Throughout this passage, Paul kept bringing them back to what they knew. In verse 1, he says “For you yourselves know....” In verse 2, he says, “As you know....” Again, in verse 5, Paul says, “As you know....” In verse 9, it’s “You remember....” In verse 10, he says, “You are witnesses....” And in verse 11, he says, “As you know....”

So basically in verse 9, Paul says, “I want you to remember what you know. You remember how I lived among you.” Paul was their hard-working, spiritual father. Paul had a right to be supported by them. It’s Biblical that a pastor who preaches the Word should be supported by the people he ministers to.

1 Corinthians 9:7 says, “Who ever goes to war at his own expense?” If you join the Air Force and they want you to fly a jet, they don’t say that you have to buy it yourself. Can you imagine that? “I want to be a jet pilot.”

“Okay, but you have to buy your own plane.”

It ain’t gonna happen. They supply what you need. The concept is the same: you are supplied what you need through your preaching.

Then 1 Corinthians 9:7 continues, “Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends the flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?”

Deuteronomy 25:4 says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” They would use an ox to tread the grain, but they couldn’t put a muzzle over the ox’s mouth. He was to be allowed to eat the grain that he was treading.

In 1 Timothy 5:17, it says, “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor...”—

which is “double pay”—“...especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”

But Paul says that he didn't take that blessing of their payment for himself. He let that go, because he loved them and he wanted to serve them. That's what he meant in verse 9 where he said, “We might not be a burden to any of you.” He said, “Remember...our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, [when] we preached to you the gospel of God.” They didn't want to charge them, debt them, burden them; they wanted to be a blessing.

In 1 Corinthians 9:14-15, Paul says, “The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have used none of these things.”

But what Paul did do was to “labor and toil.” And he did it “night and day.” The word “labor” means to work to the point of being “weary, tired and exhausted.” It means “wearisome toil.”

One of my favorite preachers of the past was Alexander Maclaren. The story was that when Alexander Maclaren was studying at his desk working on his sermons, he wore work boots, because sermon preparation is hard work. I know it's hard work. My longest, hardest day is Saturday, not Sunday. Sunday is my second hardest day. And I go home exhausted after church on Sunday. I labor all day Thursday, Friday and Saturday for Sunday morning sermons. So by the end of Saturday night, I'm exhausted. It's hard work.

And a father here is pictured as working hard. It conveys the idea that a father is to work hard to provide for and take care of his wife and family. The Bible says, “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” So the pastor is to be a hard-working individual, or a loving, caring father.

It says here he works “night and day.” In the ancient world, that was rare. You got up when the sun came up, and you went to bed when the sun went down. But Paul would light the candles at night and would make tents, so he could preach the Gospel during the day. So Paul was a hard-working minister of the Gospel. Paul was not in it for the money.

In 1 Peter 5:2-4, Peter said to pastors, “Shepherd...”—not “beat”—“...the flock of God which is among you.” So the image is that of a pastor. The word “pastor” means “shepherd.” The chief job of a shepherd is to feed the sheep, “which is among you.” Paul says, “...serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly...”—like Paul, a nursing mother and a caring father, doing it voluntarily and willingly—“...not for dishonest gain...”—you don't do it for money—“...but eagerly nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” So you don't lord it over God's people, you don't do it for money, you have to live among them and be an example. “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” I like that.

This is God's Word to pastors. “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you,” be an overseer, do it willingly—don't do it for money—but do it “of a ready mind” or “eagerly” and “be an example” to the flock. When the Lord returns, He will reward you. So Paul was a hard-working, Gospel-preaching minister.

The second mark of a concerned father is right behavior. It first involves a holy walk, verse 10. “You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you...”—there’s that phrase—“...who believe.” They saw how Paul and the others behaved among the believers.

How should a minister live? He should live a holy life. The word is “devout.” We get our word “pious” from it. It means “holiness before God.” A holy walk is a walk that fears the Lord and is obedient to Him and pleasing to God. So it is a father’s holy walk.

All of these points apply to fathers as well as pastors. I’ve actually preached Father’s Day sermons from this text. So dads, you should work hard to take care of your family. And dads, you should walk in holiness, to be an example to your family.

Then you are to live a just walk,” verse 10. It means living with integrity before men. We live a holy life before God, and we live a just life before men. Integrity is the opposite of duplicity and hypocrisy.

Nobody wants a hypocrite for a pastor. You want the real deal. You want someone who is sincere, honest and genuine, someone who believes what he preaches and lives what he preaches. And he does it unto God and not unto men. He doesn’t do it with flattery or with guile or deceit.

So this is the picture of a model minister. He is holy, lives justly and has a blameless walk, or living without fault before both God and man, before self and your own heart, verse 10. It is having a clear conscience. 1 Timothy 3:2 says the first qualification for a pastor is that he must be “blameless” or “above reproach.” Verse 10 of our text says, “Blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe.” So they lived holy, justly and blameless. No one could have an accusation stick against Paul the Apostle.

We are saved by God’s grace. And when I read this passage, I see we are also sanctified by God’s grace. What overwhelms me sometimes is that God saved me by His grace. And what equally overwhelms my heart is that God keeps me, protects me, sanctifies me and watches over me by His grace. The only reason I’m here right now is because of the grace of God. I started my ministry as a pastor as a very young man, and I’ve been preaching for over 47 years. And when I look back, all I can see is the goodness and faithfulness and the grace of God to keep me and to protect me.

The same thing is true of you. You are saved, sanctified and being sanctified. God is working in your heart. We’re going to end this section with “God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” So sanctification is a present, ongoing, continual work in your life. And it’s all by God’s grace. It’s not because you’re wonderful. It’s not because of who you are. It’s all because of the grace of God. So God saves you by His grace. And when I read these words about Paul being holy, just and blameless, praise God for His sanctifying grace!

In Philippians 2:15, Paul says, “...in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among

whom you shine as lights in the world.” What a blessing to know that God sustains us.

A favorite prophet of mine in the Old Testament is Samuel. There is the story of Hannah, who didn’t have a baby, so she prayed and God gave her a boy named Samuel. She dedicated him to the Lord all the days of his life. And when Samuel came to the end of his life, to the end of his ministry, he gave a marvelous speech to the whole nation at his retirement as a prophet. He said, “Whose donkey have I ever coveted? Whose slave or servant have I ever coveted? Whose money, gold, silver or clothes have I ever coveted?” In response, everyone was silent, because they realized Samuel had lived holy and justly and blameless among them. No one was able to accuse him of anything.

I read that and I say, “Lord, I want to end my life like Samuel.” I want to be able to say that I served the Lord faithfully, with integrity, with honesty and with humility. So blessed be the name of the Lord!

The third picture of a father—and a minister—is one who speaks wise words. Verse 9 lists hard work; verse 10 lists a holy, just and blameless walk; and verse 11, speaking wise words. Verse 11 says, “...as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children.” So a father not only works hard, he also walks holy and he uses wisely words to build up, to instruct and to teach his children.

Now notice that his words were with exhortation, comfort and charge. He said, “We exhorted.” The word “exhort” means “to encourage.” It literally means “to call to one’s side.” It’s interesting that it is connected to the word used for the Holy Spirit; the Greek word is “parakletos.” It means “one who is called alongside to comfort or strengthen” you. So Paul said that they used their words to come alongside them to comfort, encourage and strengthen them. So Paul encouraged them in his preaching. And Paul’s preaching had comfort in it, which speaks of his tenderness. He fed the sheep of God. And he charged them—“every one of you.” So it was personal. “Charged” means “to implore” from one’s own life. It is tied in with the word “to testify.” It means he wasn’t just giving information, but he’s imparting to them his own life.

When a pastor preaches and teaches the Bible, he doesn’t just do it with a cold professionalism. But he also gives you his own life. This is why you get exhausted after you preach. It’s not just peeling information from my brain to your brain; it’s also from my heart to your heart. It’s like a father with his children—imploping them to keep God’s Word, to obey God’s Word, follow the Lord. It’s lovingly imploring from his heart to the congregation. That’s why we preach the Word, but in doing that, we impart our own lives to them.

In all this, what was the pastor’s purpose or Paul’s purpose? Verse 12 says, “...that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” This is the culmination of our passage; it stops in verse 12. Paul says that the faithful steward, the gentle mother and the concerned father is all for one purpose: “that you would walk worthy.”

What is a worthy walk? It means “the same weight as.” In Ephesians 4:1, Paul said, “Walk

worthy of the calling with which you were called.” If there was a scale and Jesus was put on one side, and you were put on the other side, would you weigh the same as Jesus Christ? The word “worthy” was taken from scales; you put Jesus on one side and you on the other. So that word “worthy” means that your life weighs the same as Jesus’. Now that doesn’t mean you’re divine or you’re the Son of God. It means that you are “like” Christ, that you’re weighing the same as.

So dads are to walk like Jesus. That’s a pretty high calling. They’re to represent Christ in their homes. They’re to be the priest in their homes. They’re to be the head of their homes. They need to walk like Jesus. But all the congregants, all God’s people are to be walking worthy of God, verse 12. That’s the goal or purpose.

Then notice what God is doing: He “calls you,” verse 12. He is calling you to “His own kingdom and glory.” The moment you get saved, you are put in the kingdom of God. “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” You are taken out of Satan’s kingdom of darkness and “translated...into the kingdom of His dear Son.” That’s what happens at salvation, at conversion. But when Jesus Christ comes back in His Second Coming, He’s going to establish His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years. You’re going to be in that kingdom. When that kingdom flows into the eternal state, that would be the word “glory” in verse 12, that would be heaven.

So He’s sanctifying you by His grace, that you might walk worthy, that you might be more like Jesus. And He’s calling you into His kingdom. And you’re living in the kingdom of God, and you will be in the kingdom of God and you will spend eternity with God in heaven or glory. What a marvelous truth that is!

So the pastor’s purpose is the same as the parents’ purpose. If you’re a mother or a father, what do you want to see the most? Your children in the presence of God. All you want is to see your children in heaven. And the same is true of a pastor. He wants to see you walking worthy of the Lord, and he wants to see you in the presence of the Lord—in His kingdom and in His glory.

That’s Paul’s purpose. How does it happen? Faithful as a steward preaching God’s Word, gentle and loving as a mother, nurturing God’s people, speaking concerned wise words, a holy walk, hard working—and all of it conveying the minister’s lifestyle, so they can walk worthy of the vocation that they were called to. This is God’s pattern for the church and for the pastorate.