**Stirring Up Love Through Shepherding**

**1 Thessalonians 2:1-20 (ESV)**

January 21, 2018

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

We are in a series on stirring up love in the church. Today, we’re going to talk about stirring up love through spiritual shepherding. It’s a special application to those of you who are in positions of spiritual shepherding. So whether it’s an elder or a deacon or a women’s leader, in some way, if you are shepherding others in this church, then this is particularly applicable. But it’s also, I think, very important for all of us to be aware of that so we can encourage the spiritual shepherds, we can pray for them and pray for that leadership in this church. Because without that, then this church will not be able to glorify God. And so that’s the design. It’s to see how God intends for us to stir up love through spiritual shepherding.

1 Thessalonians is such a personal letter from the Apostle Paul. He loves this church. He’s been away from her for a little over a year now when he writes this letter. He had a lot of difficulty when he was there. He was persecuted while he was there. He, really, ran out of town in order to preserve his own life, as well as the life of his team. And yet, as he writes them, he looks forward to getting back to see them. But some things have happened. And we’re going to talk about those things that were both doctrinally as well as relationally troubling. And that’s sort of the setting of this letter. We’re going to read the first 16 verses.

***1*** *For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.* ***2*** *But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.* ***3*** *For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive* ***4*** *but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.* ***5*** *For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.* ***6*** *Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.* ***7*** *But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.* ***8*** *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.*

***9*** *For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.* ***10*** *You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.* ***11*** *For you know how, like a father with his children,* ***12*** *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

***13*** *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.* ***14*** *For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,* ***15*** *who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind* ***16*** *by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!*

May God encourage us through His Word today!

Charles Spurgeon, that great Baptist preacher of old, called the church, “The Dearest Place on Earth.” I love that title! It’s the way I think about our church family here at Bethany. I realize that some don’t have fond thoughts of the local church, when they think of the local church. Some argue, “How could a community so flawed and blemished as the local church, be called ‘The Dearest Place on Earth?’” I sympathize with the question. Yet Spurgeon understood God’s blueprint for His people. Listen to what he says about the church:

“The Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by Grace, who, though they are saved, are still sinners and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow Believers. The Church is the nursery for God’s weak children where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ’s sheep—the home for Christ’s family.”

That’s exactly what God says about His church. Every church is still in process of becoming what it one day will be. Let’s remember that! Our Lord Jesus created her, gifts her, leads her, builds her, blesses her, and one day, will ultimately perfect her. The church is not the work of man. It is God’s sovereign work designed to reveal His own glory to every person, every angel throughout all of eternity. That’s what the church is. Jesus shed His own blood so that sinners who otherwise would hate God and hate each other, would come together as one family to love God and love one another in glory to His Name. The church is the dearest place on earth to God and it is the closest representation of heaven that we will find anywhere in this broken world. Jesus designs her to be the dearest place on earth.

Now through her flaws, Satan tempts us to think of the church contemptuously; as something unworthy of our love and of our commitments. If you’re in a local church long enough, you will see many blemishes on the wedding gown of Jesus’ bride. Satan will whisper, “Neglect her. Leave her. Despise her! She is not worthy of you.” Yet, Jesus labors to make her worthy of Himself. Brothers and sisters, Jesus will succeed! It is a work that absolutely will be accomplished. What a glory to be part of Jesus’ working to take something as stained as the church and make her a beautiful, glorious bride. There’s not one believer that on that day, will not rejoice that they are part of the Bride. Friends, Jesus does not perfect us individually outside of His church, but inside of it. If we are to be perfected by Jesus and stand before Him spotless on that Day, it will be with Jesus’ church, and not separate from her.

My seminary professor, Howard Hendrix, famously warned, “If you ever find a perfect church, don’t go there!” He said, “You’ll ruin it!” (Congregational Laughter!) And that’s Spurgeon’s point as well in his message. How do we hold Jesus’ local church dear? Well, Hebrews 10:24-25 has been our theme verses for this series, and it tells us one application. We hold Jesus’ church dear, as the dearest place on earth by

**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

This commandment is given to every member of Jesus’ church, and we’ve been learning how we go about doing that. Stirring up love through encouraging one another. Stirring up love through forgiving one another when we have a complaint against one another. Stirring up love through giving financial gifts to advance the mutual work that God has given us together. And today, we’re going to consider how we would stir up love through spiritual shepherding in the church.

The main idea behind 1 Thessalonians 2 that we’re going to trace out is that God gives spiritual leaders a sacred responsibility to stir up love in the church through shepherding God’s people. When I think of spiritual shepherds or leaders here at Bethany, I think of people who have been given the role of spiritual oversight, of shepherding, of caring for other members of God’s flock. So of course, elders and deacons would be chief among them. Also included though would be deaconesses, and women’s ministry leaders, and ABC leaders and Small Group leaders and Sunday School teachers and Youth Group leaders and every other position in which one person is shepherding another.

As we look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, we’re going to consider five key responsibilities that God gives to spiritual leaders. Now, these aren’t comprehensive. There are more than five. But these are the ones that I believe this particular text addresses. Before we enter, I want to give a little bit of historical background to what we’re reading.

In Acts 17 we are told the story of the start of this precious church in Thessalonica. Paul arrives in Thessalonica after being imprisoned in Philippi. You remember how he was beaten and put in stocks with Silas. They sang hymns and then God sent an earthquake. And the Philippian jailer asked “What must I do to be saved?” The Apostle Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you’ll be saved.” And there was a miracle there.

After their release from the prison in Philippi, Paul and Silas travel to Thessalonica where again, they go into the synagogue and they begin to preach the Gospel there. After a month or so of preaching, there are some who come to know Christ. A church begins. And shortly though, after this church begins, trouble again enters into the lives of these apostles. And the believers there begin to be persecuted for their faith. Paul literally flees from the city as his enemies seek to kill him.

So Paul has been away from the church in Thessalonica for a little over a year when he writes this letter of encouragement and concern. During that year period or more, some false teachers have come into the church and they’ve perverted the Gospel in this precious church. And they begin to attack Paul’s integrity, raise concerns, raise charges against him. They tell the church that Paul, Silas and Timothy came to them for the purpose of fattening their bank accounts. Paul never took a salary during his time at the church in Thessalonica, and yet, that’s the accusation that’s being laid against them.

These false teachers whisper that Paul left the city in a hurry because he was a coward and a hypocrite. While these accusations are instigated by false teachers coming into the church, they are then disseminated and spread by ordinary church members who unwittingly are undermining the Gospel in their own church. The end result is that Paul and his team are diminished in the hearts of the members of this church. And that’s why Paul writes this letter. It’s to attend to some doctrinal problems, but also to attend to this personal relational problem. The first responsibility that Paul brings to us as spiritual leaders in stirring up love is the responsibility

**#1 To persist in courage with the Gospel (2:1-2)**

It’s to persevere, to not give up, to not quit. He writes in verse 1:

***1*** *For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.*

He says, “You know this. I’m not telling you anything new. I just want you to think back to what God did when we first came to you, because you’ve forgotten that in the midst of all this gossip and slander. You’ve lost perspective about who we are.” Paul reminds them to think back on God’s working in their lives through the personal ministry that he and Silas and Timothy had. And he says, “You yourselves know this by experience that God did a supernatural work in your life to make you worshipers, to set you apart for Himself through the Gospel, the Gospel that we proclaim to you.” Paul says, “As you begin to doubt me, do not doubt the Gospel! God transformed you through it!” And that’s what, of course, the false teachers are loosening the moorings, the pinnings from the people, with the very Gospel itself. And then he says in verse 2:

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

He says, “If this charge of being cowards and hypocrites were true, we would have never left Philippi and come to you with the Gospel. You’re not that far from Philippi. We would have just stopped altogether if that was our motivation. But God gave us the boldness. God gave us the strength after we were beaten and imprisoned and nearly lost our life in Philippi. We just went right out and came to you to bring the Gospel so that you would have life in Christ.” And he said, “And we did this in the midst of much conflict.”

That word “conflict” is the Greek word *agon*. We get the word “agony” from it. It means in the midst of striving in the face of opposition. He says, “While we were there, there was so much opposition. We still didn’t give up.” Spiritual shepherds in God’s church must prepare themselves to persevere through much opposition and pain as they serve God in the church. That pain sometimes comes from outside of the church, but also, it often comes from inside. And Paul is dealing with both of them. And he says, “I’m not giving up.” He’s providing for every spiritual leader an example that we as spiritual shepherds ought not to be surprised when some of the sheep in the church bite. We ought not be surprised about that. That’s what he’s experiencing. It’s part of Christian ministry.

No one should begin spiritual ministry, Christian ministry, if they hope for a life in which they do not suffer from personal attack. And this attack comes in various forms. Sometimes, it’s physical, like it was with the Apostle Paul. Other times, it’s verbal accusations or emotional abandonment. And Paul and Silas experienced it all. The spiritual shepherd must prepare for suffering of various kinds, and prepare so that he or she will persevere. If we do not prepare well, then we will be tempted into the sins of self-pity, self-doubt, resentment, frustration. And we will slowly shrivel into ourselves and away from ministry in Christ’s church.

Paul testified that God helped him to have a right heart. He said, “We had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.” Notice how he responds to this gossip and slander, and their tearing apart his reputation of integrity and Christian character. He doesn’t say, “Woe is me. I was there for so long. You don’t appreciate all that I’ve done. Why would I place this difficulty on my own head?” He doesn’t drop the mic and say, “I’m outta here!” That’s not what Paul does. He said, “I’m with you guys. I’m going to persevere all the way. I’m not leaving even in the face of this.” You see, these personal attacks, he understood them not to be a red light flashing for him to stop in Christian ministry. But rather as a green light, flashing him to go forward with the Gospel. This is part of the expectation of what it means to shepherd other people in Christ’s church.

So, to be more personal since Paul is personal here, when I began ministry almost 25 years ago here at Bethany, I had many sweet saints come to me and say, “Pastor, we are praying for you. We know there’s a huge target on your back and we’re asking for God to give you strength.” And every time that was said, I thanked God for the love, for the prayers.What a sweet expression of faith and encouragement to a pastor. But I have to tell you, for about the first 13 years, I had no idea what they were talking about. Really! I thought, “I have a target on my back? I don’t experience any of that. I don’t know what they’re even talking about.” And in fact, when I would hear other pastors talk about some of these internal hardships that Paul is experiencing here, of the negative criticism and the gossip and slander tearing away at their character, I would think to myself, “Well, they must not know how to pastor because if they pastored well, that wouldn’t happen to them.” Pride comes before the fall! And from that point on, I came to understand exactly what those dear saints talked about when they said, “You have a target on your back. People are going to come after you and they’re going to say all kinds of things without any foundation. They won’t come to you. They’re going to just talk. It’s going to sound really spiritual, and it’s going to hurt.

I don’t share this reality with you to illicit pity. I am incredibly blessed to be the pastor here at this church. I am loved more by this church than I deserve to be. Please understand that! I say it because as spiritual leaders, we have to prepare ourselves for that experience. If we’re not prepared for that, we’ll respond to it in a way that will destroy our own soul and ultimately destroy Christ’s church.

Too many spiritual leaders drop out of service to God because they grow weary of the battle and of the personal hurt that shepherding the church brings upon their lives. When qualified people leave the ministry of shepherding the church because of the hardship and pain it poses to them, two tragedies take place. First, for the individual, that person misses out on the joy of fulfilling the work God has prepared beforehand for them to do. And secondly, for the church, the church is left to be shepherded and led by unqualified people. And both of those are tragic. And that’s why one of the responsibilities of a spiritual leader in the church is to persist in courage with the Gospel.

**#2 To please God in the methods and motives of ministry. (2:3-6)**

***3*** *For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive*

That’s what the whisper campaign had brought about within the church regarding Paul and Silas and Timothy. He says, “That’s not true!”

***4*** *but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.* ***5*** *For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.*

Paul knows that he won’t be vindicated by everyone in the court of public opinion. And that’s not what he’s asking. He’s giving those members of the church who are reasonable, opportunity to consider what they’ve become a part of. And ultimately though, he doesn’t appeal to other members in the church to be his witness. He appeals to God. He says, “This is the ultimate authority. This is the only thing that really matters. It’s ‘What does God say about my life?’” The false teachers have sounded very spiritual and reasonable as they undermine Paul and Silas and Timothy’s reputation. They have been effective at diminishing Paul, Silas and Timothy’s esteem and appreciation among the people, in that about 16 months of time. They’ve used reports with half-truths and vague accusations to drive a wedge between people who previously loved them and now are beginning to doubt that whole relationship. And I’m sure they’re very convincing because these folks don’t have horns sticking out of their head and a big long tail sticking out of their coat. They’re very winsome and they’re very convincing in their destructive intent.

They likely used words like, and I’m putting my imagination to this: “Hey guys, can we just talk about a problem? We love Paul, right? We all love him. We love Silas. But you know, we really need to pray for those guys. They did some good things here, but lately their heart seems really off to us. It seems like they’ve become selfish and greedy. And that really makes us sad. We really don’t know what to do about it. We just need to pray. How about having a prayer meeting over this? But we also felt you guys should know.

In fact, do you remember how they took an offering in order to provide for some poor people in Jerusalem? We’re not exactly sure if that ever got to where it should have gone. I heard that they were riding a new donkey. (Congregational Laughter!) So I don’t know where they got the money for that. I’m not saying that they stole the money, because I don’t know, but I don’t know. Hey, we should love those guys though, regardless of what is happening in their lives. We need to love them. But you know, we also need to be careful to not be taken advantage of by them again. You know how great they are with words. When they’re here, they make us feel like we’re really loved. They really know how to use words in such a way as to really kind of smooth over ruffled feathers. But you know, they haven’t been here for almost 16 months. It seems like if they really loved us, they probably would have come and visited us by now.”

Do you catch the drift? They’re not going to come through the door with this bold, crazy accusation. They’re going to use these words to enter into a conversation about these guys that seems really spiritual. So the person feels like they’re actually part of something spiritual, when at the end of the conversation, here’s what happened. Those guys who loved them and brought the Gospel to them have been diminished in the hearts and eyes of the person listening. If you ask that person, “Hey, have you been engaging in gossip against Paul?” They would say, “Oh, no way! Not me!”

“Have you been part of conversations where their reputation, where their sense of appreciation and esteem was diminished because you were part of those conversations?” “Well…”

How does Paul respond to this kind of attack? Well he says, “God is witness.” That’s his confidence and that has to be the confidence of spiritual leaders. We don’t know what the court of public opinion is ever going to hold for us. And if we’re looking for that, we’re looking in the wrong place. We’re looking for a source of confidence in ministry, in a source that is so fickle. It’s a source that is broken. It’s not that we don’t love the folks that say those things or believe those things, but we can’t look to convince them in order to feel right about being involved in this work. What we do is we look to God.

“God, you know what is happening in my heart and in my life. Do you approve?” That’s the only thing! And if we have to say before others, “The only thing I do is call God as my witness. I know that that witness might not be absolutely certain to you until the Day of Jesus, but I’m confident we’re going to get there one day. And so, I’m calling Him as my witness,” Paul says. Isn’t that amazing?! God Himself will testify of our integrity, our transparency, our genuineness, our love for you on that day.

Now he also affirms not only their integrity, but their methods and motives for ministry. That’s the point of this responsibility. In other words, what Paul says is, “Remember that we followed God’s playbook in our ministry to you. In regards to our motives, our only motive was the approval of God. We didn’t act in ways to woo you to ourselves or try to sell you on us. We didn’t ask you for anything in return for our labors. We didn’t try to trick you through emotional manipulation of your sympathies. The only thing that we are about when we were with you, and when we’re with anybody, is we just want God’s approval. That’s all!” And that’s what the shepherd has to hold on to. It’s so vital for us to say, “That’s the only thing that I care about.

Secondly with regard to the method, “We didn’t share some human-invented message. We shared with you the Gospel that God delivered first to us. That’s the Gospel we proclaim to you. It’s the Gospel that brings spiritual life to you. We didn’t try to sound ‘relevant’ by teaching you what things that your itching ears wanted to hear. We just gave you the Gospel, the truth that we all are sinners. We’re lost! Jesus loves us so that He died an atoning sacrifice upon a cross. He rose the third day. And through Him, we can be set free from slavery to idols and we can get set free to know the true and living God. That’s the Gospel we gave. That’s our method.” It was the proclamation of the truth of God’s Gospel.

Spiritual leaders realize that sometimes God’s motives and God’s methods will not be enough for some people in the church. And that’s okay with them. Because again, we’re not measuring our ministry on the basis of other people’s approval. We’re measuring it solely on the basis of God’s approval. Here’s what Paul says in 2 Timothy:

**2 Timothy 4:1-4** I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

They will say, “That’s what I want to hear. Even though it’s completely devoid of the Gospel message, this is what I want to hear.”

Spiritual leaders find contentment in God’s approval of their message, their motives and their methods in ministry.

I love Jim Elliott! He you know, of course, gave his life on the mission field as a young man in his 20’s. When he was in college…He went to Wheaton College. Of course, he went there to get a Bachelor’s degree. Here’s what he says. He says, “Here’s the degree I really want.” He says, “Here’s the degree that’s of first importance to me. It’s the AUG degree.” I read that when I was a college student. It had a huge impact upon me. It still does to this day. This is the degree I’m chasing after. It’s the AUG degree. That means “Approved Unto God.” If I have that degree, it doesn’t matter what other degree I have behind my name. This is the degree I need. This is the degree I want. This is the degree that connects me to glory.

**#3 To personally love the members of God’s church. (2:7-8)**

I love this picture in verses 7 and 8.

***7*** *But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.* ***8*** *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.*

It’s easy, spiritual shepherds, to get so busy doing ministry that we forget what the heart of ministry is all about. It’s about people. It’s about loving people. Christian leadership is primarily about loving relationships and personal ministry. It’s vital for us as spiritual shepherds, if our church is going to be healthy, for us to say the same kind of thing that Paul writes here. I have such a fond affection. I love what Eric shared earlier! He shared, “I love you.” And I believe that. That’s his heart. And that’s what will bring a church growing in love for God and love for one another.

The picture of a nursing mother reminds me of sharing the time that I had with my new grandson and his parents, my son and daughter-in-law. And how sweet their love was for this little being that 12 months ago, didn’t even exist. And how much passion and care they had. One time, Kiera, my daughter-in-law, picked up little Malakai as he was crying and said, “Malakai, I am here to meet your needs.” That’s an expression of a mother. That’s what a mother says. I am here to lovingly meet your needs. Whatever you need, I will do it. And there’s such an affection. You know, moms have to get up at all hours of the night. They have to sacrifice so much of themselves. But they do so gladly because they have such fond affection for this little one.

Malakai and I had a couple bonding experiences together. One was when I offered to care for him so that Kimberly and Kiera could go off to the store and have some time together. He was sleeping restfully in my arms as I said, “Go ahead and take some time.” (Congregational Laughter!) The garage door went up and the car went out, and Malakai opened his mouth with the garage door. “WAAAAAH!” I know how to do this. I got up then and started trying to rock him. “WAAAAAH!” Okay. Then I bounced around the room. “WAAAAAH!” I’m singing to him. “WAAAAAH!” Okay. Let’s go outside for a walk. I take him outside and we walk around the block several times. “WAAAAAH!” We get inside. So this little thing takes 40 minutes. And finally, I waved the white flag of surrender. I get on my phone. “Kimberly, come home!” “Okay, we’re on our way.” 30 minutes later they get there. (Congregational Laughter!)

Here’s what happened. Here’s this child that I had no access to comforting. None whatsoever! He was crying the whole time, out of control, the loudest I’d ever heard him. I hand him over to Kiera. He stopped crying. He had a smile on his face. He was doing great! (Congregational Laughter!) What’s going on? Well, there is something that the love of a mom can do in ministry to her infant that communicates and that brings health and life. And that’s the picture of spiritual leaders in a church. It says, “I love you guys!” And you know we love you. This is why there has to be a plurality of spiritual leadership, plurality of elders. There’s no way any one of us could communicate that kind of tenderness to all of you. But together we can have a ministry that says, “That’s our heart toward you. That’s our commitment to you.”

**#4 To preach God’s Word so that members would glorify God. (2:9-12)**

***9*** *For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.* ***10*** *You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.*

Ministry is labor and it’s toil. And then he says this. This is the ministry of the Word. It changes from the imagery of a mom to the imagery of a dad. It’s a different picture. It’s very similar, but it’s a different picture. Here’s what a dad does with his children.

***11*** *For you know how, like a father with his children,* ***12*** *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

We implored you, we appealed to you, we urged you, we comforted you. All those are different translations of those three words. We instructed you. And where was their exhortation, their comfort, their appeal, their urging? It was all driven by the Gospel. It was all driven by God’s Word. So as servants of God, we are not authors creating new messages for the church to believe. We are simply echoes declaring as clearly as we can, the message that God has already given. That’s what we are. If I say anything to you different from what the Apostle Paul said 2,000 years ago, don’t believe it! You don’t need it. You don’t need to believe it.

But here is the ministry responsibility. He says, “Labor to speak the Word and apply it in ways that encourages, exhorts, instructs, comforts, urges, appeals…all these things. That’s all a ministry of the Word.” The church is the dearest place on earth because the church is the place that God has created for us to gather together to listen to God speak to us directly. Just as God’s people in Moses’ day gathered around Mount Sinai to hear God speak to the people, and it was a special event, a sacred event, so we gather in the assembly of God’s church to hear His voice together as we sit around His Word. And to what end is this teaching given? Paul says it is so that you might

***12****…walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

We long for this future day when you receive the perfection of the faith that God began in you. And we’re going to continue to teach you the Word to bring you along to that precious moment. You see, leaders, what we hope for defines what we live for. They hoped and longed for the perfection of the people with whom they worked. And they looked for that. They anticipated that future day and the completion that God would bring.

When my sons were growing up…And I know our time is short, but I want to tell this story because it’s a sweet story and I think it locks in why this responsibility is so good. I would talk often to my boys throughout their life about all kinds of things to help them start building. From the time they were wee little ones, you know, one, two years old, all the way up to the present day. I would talk with them, appeal to them, encourage them, comfort them, instruct them, sometimes correct them with the Word, to have a vision of a life that would glorify God. That was my goal. That includes a lot of temporal things as well as a lot of spiritual things.

So when my oldest son, Alexander…I think he was about 6. I didn’t ask Kimberly about this. I think he was about 6 or 7. We visited Kimberly’s college that she attended. He’s 6 or 7. It’s not too early to have him start thinking about college. That’s an important part of preparation for life and whatever God has for you to do. So we’re going around, talking about the classrooms. Kimberly is telling stories. We’re telling him, “Hey, wouldn’t it be neat to do this and do that? This is where you learn science. This is where you learn history, etc.” And so, we noticed Alexander, though. He’s normally not a quiet kid, but he was just getting quieter and quieter. We kept talking, and we go out to our car. We said, “What do you think, Alexander?” And Alexander just bursts into tears. He is undone. And he said, “Mom and Dad, I don’t want to go to college!” (Congregational Laughter!) And we realized he thought we were dropping him off right then. (Congregational Laughter!) God charges spiritual leaders to think like dads who envision a future day for God’s people in our own local church, and labor to help them get there. That’s the point!

**#5 To pray to and praise God for the members of the church. (2:13-20)**

***13*** *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it…*

Earlier on in chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians, he says

**1 Thessalonians 1:2** We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

Paul emphasized this perhaps because some in the church who knew that they were even part of unloving attacks against Paul, perhaps were thinking as they were realizing what they were part of, “What does Paul think of us now? Is he really thankful for us?” Paul says, “That’s nothing! It’s easy to love you. I know many of you hurt me. I don’t care about those things. I’m not bound up in resentment or wishes to get back at you. That’s not what I’m about. I give thanks for you. I give thanks that we’re still in relationship. I give thanks for what God is doing in your life. And I give thanks for your future. That’s what I’m about.”

You see, spiritual leadership that doesn’t enjoy the people that God has given for them to shepherd, is not able to shepherd. And part of our enjoyment is truly and authentically saying to God, “God, thank You for each one of these people. Thank you for allowing me to be part of their lives.” I want you to know that as a pastor of this church, I think God for you, making mention of you in my prayers.