**Real Care**

**1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (ESV)**

June 23, 2019

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

We’re going to be looking at 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 today. I want to encourage you to turn there in your Bibles. We’ve been thinking about this theme through the letter of Thessalonians of *Real Church*. Not every church is a real church. Jesus cautioned those seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, at least He cautioned many of them that their lampstand could be removed. In other words, the effectiveness, fruitfulness and authenticity of being a real church could be removed unless they remember, repent, return, and get in alignment with what God says is a real church. And so we’re praying for our church through this series and asking you to do that, that we would grow more and more into this conformity of a real church as God has set what a real church is in front of us. And today we’re going to specifically be looking at this theme that a real church has spiritual leaders in her that God has called, that God has placed in spiritual leadership to serve in a way that is loving and sacrificial. The Apostle Paul uses his own example in this church as a means to teach us so much about spiritual leadership. What an important matter for us!

***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.*

What a future awaits us!

Real church is a powerful instrument in God’s hands. Real church is an instrument of God’s transforming work in individual lives, but also in the family. Paul writes his letter, 1 Thessalonians, and in doing so, he gives thanks to God for the supernatural work that God performed in this small, little church. It’s a real church. Before Paul sends his letter, he has grown concerned about this real church that has been established less than a year ago when he first visited there with his team. He is concerned that the devil might have come in and drawn them away from a sincere devotion to Christ. So while he is in southern Greece, he sends Timothy up from Athens to visit them in Thessalonica so that he might discover what is happening in their assembly. Timothy arrives back when the Apostle Paul is in Corinth and he gives this report. It’s a really good report that this church is not losing her identity. She’s not losing her authenticity, her realness. She is growing in the grace of Christ. From 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 the Apostle Paul sort of explodes in thanksgiving.

**1 Thessalonians 1:2-3** We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantlymentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is so happy for this report about them that Timothy brings. Yet this church is not completely out of spiritual danger. In part of Timothy’s report is that persecution is weakening her resolve. Part of his report is that temptation toward sexual sin is corrupting her. Part of his report is that there are false shepherds who are undermining the gospel, undermining the apostle’s influence through slander and accusation.

In our text that we opened today, God gives this young church instruction both by precept as well as by Paul’s example of the real shepherding care that authentic spiritual leaders bring to a local church. And the main idea we’re going to trace through this passage this morning is that real church possesses loving and sacrificial leadership. There is no real church apart from loving and sacrificial leadership. This is a leadership that God calls. It’s a leadership that God develops and grows. It’s a leadership that God blesses His church.

I can’t adequately communicate my own personal thanks to God for the elders, the deacons and the deaconesses that the Lord has given to our church family. It is humbling. It is an honor. It is a blessing to serve alongside of them. I know that if any church possesses loving and sacrificial leadership, it’s because God is blessing that church. He is raising them up and bringing them to the church as His gift. And we are amazingly blessed. We are right to thank God for His gift of spiritual leadership.

This next week, we’re going to be ordaining two elders and a deacon. Every time we ordain spiritual leaders, we are right to consider the question: What does God expect from spiritual leaders in the church? What should we expect from them? God answers this question for us in this passage in 1 Thessalonians 2. From this passage, we’re going to consider five specific care commitments of church leaders. If you’re taking notes today, you might just jot these five specific care commitments of church leaders down on that page.

So the context is that the Apostle Paul was sent by God first to Philippi, where a church was started, but in Philippi he is beaten. He is imprisoned and persecuted for preaching the Gospel. Paul and Silas have been brutalized and held in stocks in this innermost prison. After their release, Paul and Silas and this missionary team then travel 100 miles to this city called Thessalonica where they also continue to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After a month or so of preaching, many believed in Jesus and the church is planted there. It’s a real church. Shortly after however, trouble begins there in Thessalonica as it did in Philippi, and believers are being persecuted. They’re suffering for their faith. So, Paul literally flees from the city as his enemies seek to kill him.

Paul has been away from this church for less than a year when he writes this letter of encouragement and concern to them. During this time, there have been some false teachers that have infiltrated the church in Thessalonica. These false leaders are making some charges against Paul. They are seeking to diminish his influence, diminish the honor that the members of this new congregation give to Paul and the other apostles. They tell the church that Paul and Silas and Timothy came just to fatten their bank accounts; that they’re in it for the money. These false teachers whisper that Paul left the city in a hurry because he was a coward, that he was really a hypocrite. He’s not authentic in his faith.

While these accusations are instigated by false teachers, they were being believed and spread by the ordinary members of this church.The end result is that the apostles were being diminished in the hearts and the eyes of these church members. And it was having a devastating effect because as the apostles are being diminished, the apostles’ teaching also is being diminished. It was leaving this church without wisdom, without truth, without Gospel that they needed in order to grow. So here in chapter 2, Paul uses his own personal testimony to instruct this church, but also to instruct us. It’s written underneath the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to instruct all churches throughout all time in every culture. This is written to instruct us regarding the basic responsibilities, the stewardship that spiritual leaders in Jesus’ church possess. The first care commitment that Paul brings out is that leaders of the church say to the church and to God,

**Care #1: We will not quit on you.**

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

In other words, “Something real, something genuine happened when we came to you. God did an amazing, transformative work.”

When gossip and slander infest a local church, members often lose perspective about the servants that God sent to help that church grow in Christ. Paul reminds them by saying, “Let’s think back about what God did when we first arrived to you through our ministry with you.” He says, “You yourselves know and you know this, brothers, by experience. This is what you received and experienced when we came. God did an amazing work. All glory to God, but God did an amazing, supernatural work through the Gospel when we came to you with the Gospel.” Paul is saying, “As you begin to doubt me, don’t doubt the Gospel! Remember that God is working in your hearts and in this local assembly.”

***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.*

When Paul and Silas arrived in Thessalonica, it was only a short time after they had been severely beaten and imprisoned. They still had the marks of their beating on them. He says, “You know how we were treated when we came to you from Philippi. Nevertheless, we had boldness in our God. We didn’t shirk away in cowardice. We didn’t shrink in defeat and just simply quit the ministry as a result of this harsh treatment.”

That word “conflict” is interesting. It’s the Greek word *agon*. We get the English word agony from it. He says, “Even though we were in agony when we came to you, we still had boldness in our God to declare to you the Gospel. The very message that brought this agony to us, this conflict to us, we didn’t step away from it.” Spiritual shepherds in God’s church must prepare themselves to persevere through much opposition and pain as they serve God in the church. Paul is reminding us that this stewardship of ministry in the local church is not one that is full of comfort. It’s not one that is free of pain, free of difficulty, free of suffering. And if a person is called to be a spiritual leader in the church, they must prepare themselves to persevere, to say to that church body, “We will not quit on you.”

No one should be surprised when they experience difficulty in shepherding the flock of God. Like any flock, there are sheep in that flock that have teeth, and some of those sheep bite. And so he says let’s know that this is going to happen for persecution from outside the church, but also even painful experiences from inside the church. This suffering comes sometimes in the form of physical assault. Thankfully, we in the United States are left often free of that kind of suffering. But it also comes through verbal accusations, through emotional abandonment. Paul and Silas experienced it all, and yet he says “We didn’t give up. We didn’t quit.”

If spiritual leaders do not prepare well for adversity and suffering, the sins of self-pity, self-doubt, resentment and frustration will fill our hearts and we’ll slowly withdraw. We’ll shrivel into ourselves and away from the ministry that God has entrusted us with. It’s vital that we not lose hope by keeping our eyes upon Christ and having a right expectation of what Christ says ministry is about. Here’s the truth. Real church leaders persist in courage with the Gospel. They don’t say in frustration or self-pity, “I quit.” They endure. They persevere.

Paul knows that there is a temptation to quit, for spiritual leaders. This temptation comes from the evil one, himself. He is working to destroy the church of God, and one of his primary instruments is discouragement, especially discouragement to spiritual leaders within the church. Paul recognizes that while there are people involved in this assault against him, he’s not focused on those people. He is focused upon the spiritual realm from which this difficulty originates. In a letter he is going to write to the church in Ephesus, he speaks of this very thing. He says

**Ephesians 6:10-12** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Don’t do ministry in your own power. Don’t live the Christian life in the strength of your own resources. We need every resource that God provides for us to endure, to persevere. One of the schemes of the devil is this discouragement, this assault, this pain that Satan would bring to spiritual leaders in a church. Paul says whatever difficulty we are enduring, it’s not the flesh and blood level. It’s not this horizontal level where the battle really lies. We have to be aware of this invisible spirit world. This is the realm in which the battle really takes place. Instead of looking horizontally and saying, “I need to do something about this person, that person and this group, understand that those sins are just being resources in the hands of the spiritual realm, which really, the battle is being waged against. And if we don’t understand that, we’ll be defeated. Put on the whole armor of God so that we might not be deceived, so that we might not be discouraged by these spiritual forces of wickedness. Paul testifies that God helped him to keep a right heart. He says in verse 2,

*we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.*

Paul refused to say, “Woe is me! All these folks don’t appreciate all I’ve done for them and all the pain that I’m suffering. I am not going to endure one moment longer for these ingrates. I’m outta here!” He doesn’t say that. Instead, he presses into love for God. He presses into love for these precious people, and he endures. Too many spiritual leaders drop out of service to God because they grow weary of the battle and the personal hurt that shepherding the church brings upon their lives. There are far too many! It’s vital that spiritual leaders persevere. When qualified people leave Christian ministry, the ministry of shepherding the church, because of the hardship it poses, there are two tragedies that take place.

One is personal for that spiritual leader. That person misses out on the joy of fulfilling the work that God created them and prepared for them to accomplish. There is no greater joy than taking hold of the work that God prepares for us. For every Christian, God prepares a work. And God says, “Stay at it! Don’t quit! Know that your labor in the Lord is never empty. It’s never in vain. Be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. The second tragedy that takes place is corporate. It’s for the church family. The church is left to be led by unqualified people. Because if all the qualified people get discouraged and step away from that work, who is left to lead the church? Friend, if God qualifies you and calls you to spiritual leadership in the church, remember that God sets this responsibility upon you. It’s not another person that twists your arm into it. Instead, understand God’s calling upon your life and persist with courage in the Gospel in God. Resist the temptation to quit.

The second care commitment that Paul models for us and that spiritual leaders say to God and to the church is

**Care #2: We will aim to please God, not man.**

***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,*

What a sacred trust, a sacred stewardship!

*so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.*

You might underline those words “not to please man, but to please God.” We know that there is a judgment day in which we’ll stand to give an account of our lives before God. And on that day, we’re not going to be looking over our shoulders at any other people about what they thought of our lives or our ministry. We’re going to be looking at God. And so we live our lives now simply to have the smile of God, the approval of God upon our lives, upon our ministry. So he says

***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 is not going to be vindicated by everyone in the court of church opinion. There are some in the church who won’t ever be convinced. They’ll die thinking that he has selfish motives, that he’s a greedy person. He knows it’s futile to try to win over everyone in the church. He’s just going to get frustrated. So he says, “When we came, we didn’t come and speak to you with a motive to please man. That’s not even on our radar screen. We have a single focus, a singular aim. And that is to simply please God. If we please God then everything else will fall into place as God designed it to. We’re just going to trust Him.

The false teachers have sounded very spiritual and reasonable as they seek to undermine Paul’s reputation. And so Paul says, “I am going to keep a focus on God’s view of me and not on man’s view.” I think these false teachers who are undermining Paul and Silas’ life and ministry, I think they were very winsome people. I think they were very convincing people. I don’t think that if you went into the church in Thessalonica, that you would be able to spot them by the sour look on their face and their angry demeanor. I think they appear to be some of the most friendly people in the whole church. Satan uses people who are very talented in natural abilities. And I think that rather than them being so obvious and shouting, “Paul is a terrible person! Silas is a greedy guy!” I think they probably used some really spiritual language. Because it’s this way that good men and women are drawn in.

“Hey guys, why don’t you come over here? I just want us to talk about a problem that I think I see in the church. We all love Paul, right? We all love Silas. We need to pray for them. They really did some good work when they were here. But you know, I’ve just been growing concerned about them. It just seems lately like their heart is a little off. They’ve been distant. It seems like they don’t really care about it. They would have come back to see us. I don’t know. There were some little indications when they were here, now as I look on it, that they were selfish. I don’t know. They could have been after our money. It really makes us sad. We need to really pray.”

And people get drawn right into that kind of conversation. If you had asked the church members in Thessalonica if they were being influenced by slander, the slander of these false teachers, I think they would have been shocked by the question. “What?! No, that’s not happening at all! Of course not! We’re just keeping an open mind. We want to pray. I don’t agree with everything those guys are saying. They had some doubts. I don’t know if they were true, but I don’t know if they’re not true.” In the end though, here is what happened. The Apostle Paul and Silas, these amazing people who suffered for the sake of the Gospel in this very church to establish it, in a short amount of time, they were being diminished. They were being dishonored. They were being removed from a place of esteem. And when they are removed from a place of esteem, it’s not about them. It’s about the Gospel and it’s about the teaching that they brought to the church, because the teaching gets diminished, dismissed and dishonored with them. They are apostles.

How does Paul respond to this kind of spiritual battle? Paul openly appeals to God as his witness. He says, “God Himself will testify to our integrity, our transparency, our genuineness, our love for you. We love you.” As Paul appeals to God’s testimony, he affirms that both he and Silas used the methods of ministry that God prescribed for them as well as the motives for the ministry that God gave to them. In short, he says, “Can’t you see how we followed God’s playbook every step of the way in our ministry to you? Can’t you agree with that? You know that’s true. In regard to our motives, our only motive has been the approval of God. We didn’t act in ways to woo you to ourselves, to be fans of Paul, fans of Silas. We didn’t try to sell you on us, how great we are. We didn’t ask anything in return from you for our labors. We didn’t try to trick you through emotional manipulation and try to get you to hate other people in order to like us.

In regards to our method, we didn’t offer you some humanly-invented message. We didn’t offer you our own opinions, as though our own opinions are what really mattered in the world. We simply shared the Gospel of God. It’s a message that at first we didn’t believe, but then God pressed it into our hearts. We came to realize it was the truth about all of life. It’s a message that God entrusted to us to proclaim to you. And that is what we spoke to you. That is what we brought to you. It’s a message of power from God to bring supernatural transformation, to bring spiritual life where there is death, to bring light where there is darkness. We didn’t try to sound relevant to you. We didn’t try to tell you funny stories so that your itching ears would feel good at the end of a message. We didn’t try to manipulate you through emotion or through oratory. We simply talked straight with you. We simply told you the Gospel.

It’s this good news message that God is the sovereign Lord and creator of all. We failed Him by rebelling against Him in our sin. We have a huge problem because of our rejection of Him, because of our sin against Him. But God, in love, sent His one Son, Jesus, to take on human flesh, to live a perfect life and to die upon a cross and be punished for us. And this same Jesus rose the third day and He ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of the Father. He’s going to return and He’s going to establish His kingdom. That’s the message that we brought to you. It’s the message that we called you to believe. And God worked through that message to bring about transformation.”

Spiritual leaders realize that sometimes God’s motives and God’s methods will not be enough to please people in the church. And so they said, “We’re not going to give you anything more, with greater pizzazz or with greater human effect. We’re going to continue to sink into God’s methods and God’s message. That’s who we are. That’s what we’re about. We’re just here to please God and we believe that this message has God’s power to bring salvation.”

When Paul writes a letter to a young pastor named Timothy, he’s going to press this point even further. He says, “Timothy, you’re going to get pressed to move away from God’s methods and God’s message. Here is what I’m going to encourage you with.”

**2 Timothy 4:1** 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:

“Timothy, do I have your attention? This is a charge from me in the presence of God because God is completely behind this. He’s totally in agreement with this charge that I’m going to give you. You’re going to stand before Him and you’re going to give an account on the basis of whether you were a good steward of the ministry that God has given you. There is a kingdom to win, here. Here is the charge.”

**2 Timothy 4:2** preach the word;

“It’s that simple, Timothy. That’s your method. That’s your message. Preach the Word!”

**2 Timothy 4:2** be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort,

In other words, when people seem to be ready to receive it and when people seem totally not ready to receive it, continue to preach the Word. Whether it’s pleasing to those who hear it or whether it’s completely displeasing, preach the Word. And when you preach the Word, there are three things that are going to happen. You’re going to have to reprove. You’re going to have to rebuke. You’re going to have to exhort.

How many of you woke up this morning saying, “You know what I really need? I need to be rebuked. That’s what I really need.” None of us do that. None of us like those things. All of us say, “I don’t even need exhortation. I already know what to do, so don’t tell me what to do.” Exhortation is telling us what we need to do. And then there’s rebuke and there is reproof. It’s correction. Those are all hard things and that’s what the Word of God always does. He says, “Timothy, this is your responsibility week in and week out. Preach the Word! And as you preach the Word, you’re going to bring reproof, you’re going to bring rebuke, and you’re going to bring exhortation.” And then he says to do this

**2 Timothy 4:2** with complete patience and teaching.

In other words, don’t get angry or frustrated with the people. And make sure you do it with patient instruction. Give them the truth. Don’t shout at them. Just give them the truth with gentleness. That’s how you do it.

**2 Timothy 4:3** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching,

So do it while there’s this window of opportunity open for the church. At that time people will

**2 Timothy 4:3-4** 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’ll say, “We don’t want any teacher who is going to correct us, rebuke us and reprove us. We only want teachers who are going to affirm us and tell us what we want to hear.” But Timothy, preach the Word. That’s your stewardship. Real church leaders aim to please God, not man. They do it by proclaiming the Word, by reproving, rebuking and exhorting with complete patience and with teaching.

Spiritual leaders find contentment in God’s approval of their message because it comes from God, and of their methods. We eagerly long to hear from Him, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” If God gives us the stewardship of spiritual leaders, let’s commit ourselves to God’s methods and God’s message. The main fruit God asks us to produce in ministry is the fruit of His approval. Every other fruit, that’s what He produces. But we have it within our responsibility to produce the fruit of His approval by simply following His instructions. It’s not in our area of responsibility or in our area of ability to be able to bring converts, to be able to grow the church, to be able to, fill in the blank. That’s all God’s working. Ours is simply to plant and to water with patience, with teaching, with clarity, and then watch God work whatever He wills.

***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.*

Here is an application for the whole church. If God gives you real church leaders, and I believe He has given us real church leaders here at Bethany, pray for them by name. Pray that God would give them grace to resist the desire to please man. It’s within all of us, every one of us, a natural desire to wish that everyone would approve. And it’s not a very large step to move from that natural desire that we can’t get rid of, which is “I just hope everybody likes me.” It’s not very far from that step which is part of all of our lives, to the next step, which is, “Now I’m going to act in ways to see that they will like me.” And we move outside of Christian ministry when we take that step. So let’s pray for our leaders, that God would give them grace to seek the pleasure of God.

God’s methods are simply speaking the Gospel, the profound truth that God loves us and sent His Son, Jesus to die on a cross. He sent His Son Jesus to be raised from the dead and to return to establish His kingdom and His glory. God’s spiritual leaders say to God and to the church,

**Care #3: We will love you personally.**

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

I love this imagery! He is showing a model for spiritual leadership inside the church. It’s of 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.*

Do you catch these words that communicate this deep affection? It wasn’t just a message to communicate. It was a life to be given. Spiritual elders know that this work of shepherding the church is not for a person who wants to join church business meetings and make decisions. Now, that’s a part of spiritual eldership. There is a part of this work in which we get in a room and we talk about the needs of the church and make some decisions, but that’s not *the* work of a spiritual shepherd, of an elder. That’s a necessary part, but it’s not the heart. It’s not the main thrust of spiritual ministry in the church. This work, this ministry is personal work with people. It requires an open heart and an open home.

Pray for your leaders in this regard. It’s easy to become so busy doing ministry that we forget the heart of ministry, the heart of loving people. It’s really hard to love people when you are exhausted, when you see so many tasks in front of you. They’re just building up and you have so much to accomplish just to meet what you feel are expectations both from God and from people. Here is this great word picture of a nursing mother that reminds us of the heart of spiritual ministry. Christian leadership is primarily about loving relationships and it’s about personal ministry.

When we think of a mother caring for an infant child, isn’t there a lot of tasks that just simply get undone in order to care for the baby? Isn’t that true, moms? “Okay, I had a list of ten things to do and I got through minus one of them. So I’m actually in the hole at the end of the day.” But a mother who understands the stewardship of motherhood says, “Here’s what my day was like. Here’s what I did today. I fed my baby. I cared for my baby. I rocked my baby. That’s what I did.” And oftentimes, that is the picture of what God gives to us for spiritual leadership, for really healthy spiritual leadership. Spiritual leaders have to make decisions and say, “You know what? We’re not going to accomplish everything.” There are probably going to be some in the church who say, “Why isn’t the church doing this? Why isn’t the church doing that? Why do we not have this program?” I say I’m sorry it just didn’t get accomplished. I wish it could, but we really need to love people and a lot of times, loving people simply takes time. It takes energy to maintain a heart of love.

We have one grandson and one is on the way here in November. I remember sweet Kiera as she had little infant Malakai. As an infant, we were at their house and he was crying. And Kiera said to him, “Dear Malakai. I am here to meet your needs. What can I do for you, today?” I thought that is such a perfect expression of a nursing mother.Paul says to spiritual leaders, “If you want to know what ministry in a church is like, what this work is that you’re about ready to engage in, watch the loving moms in your church and how they care for their infants. Observe their tenderness. Observe their patience. Observe their gentleness. Observe their commitment.” When a baby starts crying, that mother is there. Observe their affection. That’s the picture of what it’s like to lead in a church.

Spiritual leaders, invest in tenderly caring for the members of the church that God sets before us. Let’s imitate the heart of a nursing mom when we come to church on a Sunday morning. When we wake up on Monday, think about those folks and relate to them. Let’s imitate the heart of that nursing mom. And this is the reason why a big church like ours needs many, many, many spiritual leaders. Because it’s impossible to care for all with the fondness and the personal effects that is our desire. So pray that God would continue to raise up spiritual leaders in our church with this kind of heart. Real church has leaders who personally love the members of the church family.

**Care #4: We will labor to teach you God’s Word.**

***9*** *For you remember, brothers,*

I love that he keeps using this word “brothers.” He’s known them for such a short time, yet he says “You’re my family. You’re tighter than blood to me. There is a bond here that is forever. You’re part of the family of God. We share God as our father, and that’s the reason why we’re brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a commitment we have that is in the church.”

***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.*

So there is a labor just for their own sustenance. They didn’t ask for money from them. But there is also labor in proclaiming 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,*

So the first family image he gives to spiritual leaders is a nursing mother, but now he uses the image of 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.*

He highlights the labor of ministry. “We toil night and day,” he wrote, “to teach you God’s Word. And as we taught you God’s Word, we exhorted.” That’s a word of strength. It requires energy to exhort someone. “We encouraged you. We entered into your needs and we encouraged you. We wanted to strengthen you. And we charged you. We tried to motivate you with the truth of the Gospel to live in a manner worthy of God. He is a God who calls you into His kingdom. He calls you into His glory. We have this vision for your future.”

I’m so thankful to be a father of three sons and now two daughters through marriage. What a blessing! If you’re a parent, you know and understand this heart that Paul is talking about, the heart of a father toward his sons. Throughout my life, God has given me a real vision for the future of my children. And so I would talk to them early about their need to submit to God, to listen to Him, to walk with Him, and to just live a life of wisdom. I was trying to give them a picture of their future. And that’s what a father does. He exhorts, he encourages, he charges, to help his children have a future that is bright, that is glorious, that is meaningful, that is purposeful.

Now, Paul’s exhortation, encouragement and charge, though, comes again from the Word of God. It doesn’t just come from his own heart. “This is what I want you to do and be because this is the way I wanted to live my life.” His charge was based upon the Word. Christian ministry is not a place for leaders to express their own opinions about life, about society, about philosophy, about politics. It’s a place for us to speak on behalf of God; to exhort, teach, instruct, encourage through the Word. We are not authors of our message. We are entrusted with a message from another, a message from God Himself. So that makes us simply echoes. God speaks His Word and a Christian minister is like a rock face in a canyon. The message comes to that rock face and then it bounces off and you hear it repeated. And so that’s what we are as Christian ministers. We don’t change that message. The message doesn’t come in one way and come out another. We don’t create it. It doesn’t emanate from it. We’re just simply echoes of God. That is our responsibility.

I would hope that if you are here for weeks, months and years of your life listening to messages from myself or any of the other pastors, that none of us would say anything that is original. Have you ever had a speaker say that to you? I hope you don’t hear me say anything that is original. Original is not good in Christian ministry. Original means it’s coming from me. Now I hope through the Word of God in our study that we’re able to discover and draw these precious jewels because this Word is so rich. But always, that what we say comes from God. It’s a message that God has already given. We’re just simply echoes; echoes that are clear, echoes full of conviction, echoes that the Holy Spirit uses to bring specific applications personally. We’re echoes. We want you to say, “There’s nothing really that Ritch or Josh or any other teachers here have taught me other than what is already here in this Book that is living and that is active.”

Real church leaders commit to preaching and teaching the Word. And real church is a place that God created for us to gather together to listen to His Word. That’s how central His Word is to our life; life individually and our life corporately. God tells us to be His servants who simply teach His Word, who preach His Word, who explain His Word, who proclaim His message. That’s what we are.

The principle, as we think about the ministry of spiritual shepherds acting as fathers toward their children, is that what we hope for defines what we live for. And so, as I was expressing, as my children were growing up, I would try to give them a vision of what they could hope for; God’s promises of His kingdom, of His glory. And I remember a time when my son Alexander was seven and we went to visit the college of my wife’s alma mater. It’s a Christian college out in Virginia. We were taking a visit there at the college and I was thinking it’s time to kind of get Alexander excited about future academics and how that would prepare him for life, and to have a vision for that so that he would then live for that. So we went through this entire visit and the whole time Alexander was unusually quiet. We ended our tour, and as we were approaching our car I asked, “Well, Alexander, how did you like the tour?” All of a sudden he just broke out in tears. And he said, “Daddy, I don’t want to go to college.” I was like, “What do you mean? Why don’t you want to go to college?” He said, “Because I love being with you and mom.” He thought we were dropping him off that day. (Laughter!) He thought this was his matriculation day and that we were trying to get him excited because “we’re going to leave you here. We’re going to get in the car and good luck, son!” God charges spiritual leaders to think like dads who naturally envision a future day when their children are mature, and to start building them now so that that future day is really joyful, really purposeful, really meaningful. That’s what spiritual leaders are.

**Care #5: We will constantly thank God in prayer for you.**

That’s a commitment that spiritual leaders make. Now again, Paul suffered some indignities. He suffered some insults. He suffered through gossip and slander. It did not change his heart for those people. He wasn’t filled with bitterness and resentment. He wasn’t filled with, “Boy, I wish that person wasn’t here anymore.” He was just filled with thankfulness. He saw that God began a good work in them. He saw that when they received the Word, there really was transformation. There was genuine, authentic life-change through the Holy Spirit. He knew that means that when God begins a work, He’s going to complete it. He knew that in the end, in the kingdom, those folks would be perfected and they were going to bring glory to God. And so that’s what he parked on. Not their current sins, not their current fleshiness. He parked on the work of God and he says, “I’m just going to always thank God for you.” Look at what he says here

**1 Thessalonians 2:13-14** 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.

He said, “That’s a supernatural work of God. No one has that experience apart from God’s supernatural work. And I just want to thank God for you.” We remember earlier, he did the same in chapter 1.

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

So this is a y’all. It’s not just most of you. It’s every one of you. And that’s the heart of a spiritual shepherd. I just thank God in prayer for each person that God places in the care of our shepherding responsibility. Paul emphasized that he thanked God for them. I think he emphasized this in this letter, twice he’s going to talk about it, perhaps, and this is my guess, now. It was perhaps because some of those folks knew that they had been party to this slander and they’re being confronted on it in this letter, and they’re thinking, “Is Paul talking about me? And if he is talking about me, I think he is because I think I’ve been part of this, does he care for me anymore? Has Paul’s heart been withdrawn because of my past actions?” And Paul says, “No. I want all of you to know that I thank God constantly for every one of you because I see that God is doing an amazing, supernatural work. Regardless of the hindrances of your own sins, I want you to know I thank God constantly for you.” And he meant it.

Spiritual leaders, let us thank God for every person in our spiritual family and let us commit to praying for them. And I would add, to continue ministering the Word of God to each and every one. Real church has leaders who genuinely thank God for members in the church. It’s humbling. It’s wonderful!Family, I would encourage you to help us leaders by telling us how we can pray for you, opening up your hearts to us so that we can have personal ministry with you and for you.

Skip forward, and we’ll look at this next week. Pastor Josh will be coming. But look at verses 19 and 20. This is Paul’s real heart. It’s an expression of his heart toward a church that again, started to have some turn away from him. He says

**1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

When we think of the future, what do we think about? What makes us really excited about that future that is certain for us who are in Christ? What causes us such deep gladness? What is the greatest part of our reward? When Jesus returns, what is going to be on our minds? Paul says, “On that day, when we’re finally perfected in Christ, is it not that we’re going to look around, we who have the privilege of being spiritual leaders, spiritual shepherds and say, ‘God, you used us to create this family of perfected saints that we get to enjoy forever and ever?’ You are our joy. You are our crown of boasting.” That’s the heart of a spiritual shepherd.

Our Lord has gifted Bethany with some amazingly qualified, loving, sacrificial, gifted leaders. Real church is a beauty to behold as God designed her. It is a family to enjoy. It is a force to promote God’s glory. It is a megaphone to announce the Gospel to a world that is walking in darkness. It is a haven to protect us when we’re assaulted by the evil one and by the brokenness of this world. Nothing more wonderful than the local church exists than when we live for God’s glory together, when we match this design God has for us. Charles Spurgeon called the local church “the dearest place on earth.” Brothers and sisters, let us press forward into this reality, into this gift, into real church. Leaders, let us be examples of Christ and of His Gospel. Brothers and sisters, let us pray for our spiritual leaders. For the glory of God and the good of His people, let us pursue real church together!