



1 Thessalonians 2:1-12  
Living as Followers of Jesus  
“Traits of a Disciple”

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This morning we continue our journey through Paul’s letter to the church in Thessalonica. It was, and still is, a port city in Greece. Paul visited there with two other ministry companions, Timothy and Silas, and shared the Gospel message of Jesus Christ with people – both Jewish folks and others. Out of that ministry, a church began. Sometime after Paul and his companions left, Timothy took a journey to visit them and see how they were doing in their discipleship to Jesus. He brought back a report to Paul. That report prompted Paul to write to the church, and that is this letter. A second letter was written later as well, that we know as 2 Thessalonians. But today we come to chapter 2 as we journey through the first letter to understand the context and what’s going on in it, and then what it means for us Jesus followers today.

**Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to defend yourself verbally, and sort of “set the record straight” but you didn’t want to come across as being defensive?** It can be a fine line to walk, but it can be done. Emotions, tone of voice, body language, and the words used can all impact how you come across in that situation. I remember once about 15 years ago, at my previous church, a pastor friend of mine who was on a regional committee with me that helped oversee churches in times of difficulty or transition between pastors and so forth...he took me aside to give me some words of council and correction on something that the and this committee thought I’d overstepped my bounds as pastor. I don’t remember any of the details, but it was initiated by someone in my church who had reached out to this committee with some complaint about me and how I’d handled something with him.

I can still remember the room we were in, and where we were sitting. I was fairly stunned at what I was hearing. So, after he shared the concerns of this committee, I shared my response. And mostly what I did was just lay out the facts, and the timeline of events, including that I had reached out for advice and counsel from others, and that I had followed that advice, including the advice of the guy sitting across from me in that moment telling me I’d been out of line. It was a little tricky, but I just had to gently say, “Hey don’t you

remember that I reached out to you, and here's how you suggested I handle this situation? That's what I did." It was one time that I think I handled myself pretty well in a situation like that – I have not always been so successful, for sure, and I've learned from my mistakes.

In today's passage, we see Paul doing this, as well about his own ministry. And the benefit for us nearly 2,000 years later of his reply is that we get a window into his ministry. And as he writes here, we see four traits of his ministry. There are basically four characteristics that shine through and mark his own discipleship to Jesus, and how he discipled others. So, let's dive into today's passage. We'll read the whole thing at once this morning, **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**. Then pray.

So, first off, the reason he writes this is not to get defensive or boast or brag, but to respond honestly to criticisms that are being leveled against him in Thessalonica from outside the church, to undermine his ministry and the faith of these new believers. New Testament scholar, David Hiebert, writes, **"Paul is answering the insidious attacks being made by scandalmongers outside the church because of their hatred for him" (David Edmond Hiebert)**. These people want to discredit his ministry and therefore, lead these new believers away from Jesus.

Now, sometimes in Paul's letters, it's like we're hearing one side of a telephone conversation and we don't know what's being said on the other side. Fortunately, here in this chapter, we get glimpses into the other side of the conversation. For instance, here's just a few of them:

- 1 Thess. 2:3, "...the appeal we make does not spring from error..."
- 1 Thess. 2:3, "the appeal we make does not spring from...impure motives..."
- 1 Thess. 2:3, "...nor are we trying to trick you."
- 1 Thess. 2:4, "...not trying to please people but God..."
- 1 Thess. 2:5 and 2:9, "...we did not put on a mask to cover up greed"; "we worked night and day not to be a burden..."
- 1 Thess. 2:6, "We were not looking for praise from people..."

So, he appeals to the experience these new believers had of him and his companions. He appeals to what they heard and observed while he was with them, the logic of the teaching he gave, and how he lived while he was with them, and so forth. And as he recounts his time with them, we see four traits of his discipleship and his ministry.

**The first trait we see is in verse 2, and it is: “boldness” for Jesus.** He writes, “...with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel...” Many translations will read “...we had the boldness to tell you of his gospel...” That word “bold” is a great way to summarize this particular trait of his discipleship – both his own discipleship to Jesus, and the way in which he disciplined other people on their journey. And it’s not a boldness that comes from himself, it’s something that’s been given to him: “with the help of our God, we had this boldness” or “with the help of God, we dared” to speak about Jesus. The boldness comes from God. How? If Paul were here or if he’s shared more about that, I believe he would say that it’s an outgrowth of his relationship with Jesus, the fruit of time spent in Scripture, in prayer, talking about Jesus and their faith with other believers....it comes from being convinced at a deep level that Jesus is who he says he is, and so we can trust him...we can step out in faith and be bold and daring for him. That’s the root of this boldness.

**The second trait is: sincere motivation.** Several of the accusations have to do with motivation: deceit, uncleanness, people pleasing rather than God-pleasing. People said these are what Paul and his companions were really about. And so Paul reflects on his ministry with them, which paints a picture for us that his ministry was born out of sincere motivation that the people he disciplined would know Jesus as Lord and Savior. He is all about the good news of Jesus, the euangelion of Jesus that we talked about a couple Sundays ago at great length. And so ultimately, as he writes in verse 4, “We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.” In other words, as much as he wants others to come to faith in Jesus, the root motive is to please God. To glorify God. To magnify God. To exalt God. His motives are pure.

**The third trait is: gentleness.** We see this in verse 7. You know, when I think about the apostle Paul and his ministry and all that we know about him,

and the passion with which he lived his faith, and the things he wrote, “gentleness” is not what I first think of. I think of fiery, impassioned pleas for people to put their faith in Jesus, and I think of robust intellectual and theological arguments for faith in Jesus as well. It’s not that “gentleness” is completely absent, but it’s just not a primary thing about his ministry to me. And yet here he writes. “Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you.” And then he continues on to say how he and his companions “shared not only the gospel, but their lives” with the Thessalonians. It’s a very tender, gentle picture that is painted.

**Lastly, their ministry is marked by: integrity.** We read in verse 10, “You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.” In other words, Paul and his companions lived with integrity. Godly integrity. This one is sort of the capper on them all. If he has no integrity, then his appeals about the other issues lose credibility. If he’s exaggerating or making things up in regards to his integrity, it really undoes all the others even if they are true.

This question of integrity gets to the heart of Jesus’ ministry, and also our response to Jesus. There are some people who say Jesus was a “good, moral teacher...someone who lived and taught with integrity” but don’t believe he’s the son of God and God come to us in the flesh. The problem with saying Jesus taught with integrity but he’s God come to us, is that Jesus actually taught that he is God come to us. If he’s lying about that, then he actually is not a very good or moral teacher. He would have no integrity.

But that *is* part of his teaching, and it has to be wrestled with if you’re going to say Jesus was a good, moral teacher. It’s a question of Jesus’ integrity, and our own integrity in how we assess and respond to Jesus. So, living with integrity – “holy, righteous, and blameless” as Paul puts it here – is key. It’s a mark of his discipleship, and I pray it is for us as well.

**So, boldness, sincere motivation, gentleness, and integrity are four marks of Christian discipleship we see in this passage.** We might look at these four and ask ourselves, “Which ones are marks of my discipleship to

Jesus, and which ones are lacking a little?” If I were to assess our church on the whole, as a family of faith...like what’s the “personality” of our church in regards to these four characteristics, I’d say we have sincere motivation, I think we are a gentle church...we’re a safe place for people to come, and I think our sense of integrity is high. I’m not saying we’re perfect at all of those, but I think those three are pretty strong for us. I think “boldness” as a church is probably the one that could be stronger. And I get it, we don’t want to be a church, for example, that is bold but has no gentleness. That kind of church, and that kind of Christian, is not kind, gracious, or representative of the forgiveness that God offers.

So, maybe more boldness...more courage...more willingness to take some risks for Jesus and trust that even if it’s hard or scary or not in our comfort zone...Maybe that kind of boldness could be a little stronger here at Rose Hill. I’m not saying that’s true of each person individually. But the overarching personality of Rose Hill Church, I think, could be a little bolder for Jesus, a little more willing to take a risk for Jesus and step out in faith for him, so that we might lead people toward Jesus and flourish as a church. **In fact, in our denomination, one of the characteristics of a flourishing church that we’ve identified – and a characteristic of a flourishing disciple of Jesus – is “normalizing risk-taking”; to be bold for Jesus as a regular, normalized trait.** And I think, on the whole, we could be bolder.

Maybe in your own life that’s true as well...maybe for you, taking a bold step for Jesus means going to a class or joining a small group, and maybe that’s a scary, bold-feeling step for you. Maybe being bold means serving in some new role – from Elder or Deacon to Sunday music leadership to greeter to teacher...I mean, the opportunities to be bold and step into a new role are endless, and the opportunities are there; there is room for you to serve here at Rose Hill. Maybe being bold for you means more of an evangelistic boldness like Paul did with the Thessalonians...like sharing your life a little more deeply with a neighbor or a co-worker, or offering to pray for someone, inviting them to a ministry event, or to a worship service. I don’t know. For some of you, you took a bold step just by coming here for the first time. I mean, stepping through the doors of a church for the first time, especially if you haven’t been in a church ever or in a long time, that can be scary. It’s a

bold step. Or maybe of the four traits here, the one you could be stronger on is one of the others. I suspect for a lot of us, however, it's this "boldness" one that we struggle with.

So, take a little time to reflect on these four traits of discipleship, and be honest about how strong they are in your life. It's ok to acknowledge that your walk with Jesus is strong in some of these things, or all of them if that's the case. **But where we need God to lead us and equip us to be stronger, let's be honest and open about that, and look for opportunities God gives us to grow.** God is completely faithful and trustworthy and will give you what you need in order to live your discipleship to Jesus...to be led into a deeper walk with him...and bring him all the honor and all the glory. Whether it's more boldness or gentleness or sincere motivation, or integrity, God can work on your heart and strengthen you. Now, it won't happen without your own effort of course. As the saying goes, "God won't give you a shovel and then tell you to pray for a hole in the ground." He will give you opportunities and resources to grow in faith, to grow in these four traits of discipleship; but it will take our response. Just as Jesus invites us to follow him, to trust in his life, death and resurrection: we still have to say yes and then start walking. So it is with our growth in these discipleship traits. I pray that our lives, and our church might be marked by boldness for Jesus, sincere motivation, gentleness, and integrity, and that he would be given all the honor, praise and glory. Let's pray...Amen.