

Model for Ministry

INTRODUCTION: Our message series is called “**Lessons from a Growing Church**,” and we are seeing what lessons God has for us as a church as study Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica. As we saw in chapter one, Paul’s ministry among the Thessalonians had been incredibly effective. The church had been birthed through the power of the gospel. The Thessalonian believers responded to the gospel with faith and joy. They demonstrated the visible results of the gospel: verbal witness for Christ and the powerful testimony of a changed life. **So, what was it that made Paul’s ministry so effective?** Here in chapter two, he tells us the principles of ministry he followed which are the same principles we can follow in ministry today. (Read **1 Thessalonians 2:1-4** 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.-4 and pray.)

So, how are your investments doing? If you’re like most of us, both up and down, right? We generally make one of two mistakes when it comes to investing. **Either we don’t invest at all, or we don’t invest wisely.** And when it comes to ministry, we often make the same two mistakes. Either we do not invest time in ministry at all, or we do not invest our time wisely.

People spend a lot of time on our earthly investments. They hire financial advisors. They read stock reports. They track their

portfolios. There's nothing wrong with that, but we must always remember that financial investments are for this life only. **Ministry investment has eternal value.** We are investing in people's lives for all of eternity. What could be more important than that? And yet many people either do not invest time in ministry, or they do not invest wisely.

Ministry is not just what the pastors do. We like to say that our church has one pastor but many ministers, because every person in the church is called to serve. **We spend a lot of time ministering in our church.** Every year in our church alone, hundreds of people invest thousands of hours in ministry. Now multiply that by all the churches around the world. That's a whole lot of ministry! And the more ministry that takes place, the more critical the question becomes: Are we being effective? Not just, are we investing time for the kingdom of God, but are we investing our time wisely for the kingdom of God?

Imagine investing years of savings towards retirement and then discovering that you had not invested your money wisely – that your investments could have been far more effective if you had just followed some simple time-honored principles of financial investing. If you were going to invest substantial amounts of money, wouldn't you want to know those principles in advance?

Now imagine investing years of your life in ministry and then discovering that you had not invested your time wisely – that you could have been far more effective in ministry if you had just followed some simple, time-honored principles of ministry. **If you were going to invest substantial amounts of time in ministry, wouldn't you want to know those principles in advance?**

Here in 1 Thessalonians 2 Paul gives us some investment advice. In these twelve verses Paul tells us the basic principles of effective ministry. He does this by reminding the Thessalonians how he did ministry among them. Six times Paul calls upon their knowledge or remembrance of his ministry among them. **He wasn't telling them**

anything they didn't already know. He was simply reminding them of the principles of effective ministry that they themselves witnessed when Paul was there.

So how do you minister effectively? We are going to look at three things this morning: **Effective ministry requires: 1) unwavering commitment to the truth; 2) genuine love and concern for people; and 3) godly example and exhortation.** To put it simply, effective ministry is based on truth, love and godliness. So, let's look at these three lessons for effective ministry together.

I. Effective ministry requires unwavering commitment to the truth (1-6)

First of all, effective ministry requires **unwavering commitment to the truth.** God is truth, and therefore you cannot minister effectively without truth. Every aspect of your ministry must correspond with truth. Your message must be true. Your motives must be pure. And your methods must be honest and completely above-board. Let's look at each of these in turn.

A. Your message must be true (1-2)

First of all, your message must be true. Look at verses 1-2 with me now:

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. (1 Thessalonians 2:1-2)

Paul reminds the Thessalonians how he and his companions had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi. They certainly suffered. We talked last week how they had been beaten, flogged, and imprisoned with their feet in stocks. Paul says here that they

were also insulted. The word means to be “shamefully treated.” *They were unjustly arrested, stripped of their clothing and sent to prison without a trial.* All this was in direct violation of Paul’s Roman citizenship. In fact, when the prison officials came to release them the next morning, Paul refused to be released without an escort, so great was the insult he had suffered as a citizen of Rome.

Why did they suffer all this abuse in Philippi? **Because they had shared the gospel.** All this suffering and shameful treatment was fresh in their minds as they entered Thessalonica. If they shared the gospel here, the same thing might happen. But they remembered another result of their visit to Philippi. They had planted a church. People had come to know Christ. The gospel was going forth. And so, they dared to tell the gospel in Thessalonica also. The phrase translated “dared to tell” means “to speak boldly or freely.” Without any hesitation or reservation Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica despite what he had just suffered in Philippi.

Perhaps you’ve been hurt in ministry in the past. Maybe you’ve suffered or been insulted in different ways. Maybe you’re tempted to hold back in the present. Paul’s example says “no,” you move forward. Paul did this in spite of strong opposition in Thessalonica as well. That word “opposition” is the word used of a struggle or contest in the stadium. It is the word from which we get our English word “agony.” It is the picture of an athlete struggling to win a contest or a race. **Picture a runner straining for the finish line or a gladiator fighting for his life. That’s how strong the opposition was at Thessalonica.**

How was Paul able to share the gospel amidst such strong opposition, especially after his painful experience in Philippi? Paul knew that in order to minister for God, his message must be true. Only the truth of the gospel message could bring salvation to the

Thessalonians. Paul says, “With the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel,” that is, God’s gospel. It is God’s gospel. It is God’s message. We dare not alter it, add to it, or water it down. That’s the first part of an unwavering commitment to the truth. Your message must be true.

B. Your motives must be pure (3-4)

Next, your motives must be pure. Look at verses 3-4 with me now:

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. (1 [Thessalonians 2:3-4](#))

The effective minister for Christ must have pure motives. There can be no selfishness, no hidden motives, no impurity. The word Paul uses for “impure” here is the general word for “uncleanness.” It is used most often of sexual impurity but can refer to any kind of uncleanness. Our motives must be pure, sincere, free from self-interest and free from the drive for personal gain.

Paul says in verse 4 that he has been “approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.” The word translated “approve” here means “to approve after careful examination.” God examined Paul’s life and motives carefully and then granted him “The Good Ministry Seal of Approval.”

How does God examine us for ministry? The same way he did with Paul. He tests our hearts. As it says in [Hebrews 4:13](#): “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” In order to minister effectively, your heart must be in the right place. You may fool other people, but **God tests the heart.**

C. Your methods must be completely honest and above-board (5-6)

So, your message must be true, your motives must be pure, and thirdly, your methods must be completely honest and above board. Look at verses 5-6: 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.. (1 Thessalonians 2:5-6)

Your methods in ministry must also correspond with truth. You need to be transparent. You need to deal honestly with people. Paul says, “we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed.” *Flattery here does not mean saying nice things about someone to make them feel good.* It means saying what others want to hear in order to gain influence over them for your own selfish purposes. Flattery has no place in Christian ministry. There is also no room for deceit or fraud. Back in verse three Paul said, “we never tried to trick you.” Here in **verse five**, he says “we never put on a mask to cover up greed.”

Sadly, not every ministry is honest or above-board. There are people in so-called “ministries” who will tell you what you want to hear in order to get what they want to get. They will lie to you, deceive you, trick you and use you. They will never tell you up front about their deceitful methods. If they did, you would never support them. So, they put on a mask, they pretend to be concerned for your welfare, and they use you for their own advantage. **If they do not repent, God’s judgment will be severe.**

How did Paul make sure that he kept his own methods honest? The answer is found in verses four and six. He did not try to please men, but God. He was not looking for praise from men – not from the Thessalonians or anyone else. How do you keep your methods honest? Work for God’s approval rather than man’s approval. Seek to be faithful rather than popular.

So, that’s our first principle for effective ministry. Effective ministry requires unwavering commitment to the truth. 1) Your message must

be true. 2) Your motives must be pure. And 3) Your methods must completely honest and above-board. Effective ministry is based first of all on truth.

II. Effective ministry requires genuine love and concern for people (7-9)

The second principle for effective ministry is this: effective ministry requires genuine love and concern for people. God is love, and therefore you cannot minister effectively apart from love. You must be committed to people as well as to truth.

A. You must deal gently with people (7)

First, you must deal gently with people. Look at the end of verse 6 into verse 7 where Paul writes:

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[c] among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ([1 Thessalonians 2:6-7](#))

As an apostle Paul could have been a burden to the Thessalonians. He could have demanded financial support, food and lodging. The people probably would have given it to him. Instead, Paul chose to be gentle among them, like a mother caring for her little children.

The word Paul uses for “mother” here is the word for a nursing mother, one who nourishes or feeds her child. The word “caring” means “to keep warm, to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care.” Paul’s ministry to the Thessalonians was marked by gentleness and tender care as he shared with them the gospel of God.

B. You must share your life as well as the gospel (8)

Secondly, you must share your life as well as the gospel. Look at verse 8 where Paul writes:

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. (1 Thessalonians:2-8)

Genuine love and concern go well beyond sharing the message of the gospel. Effective ministry means investing in people, giving of your time, sharing your life. This was not a burden to Paul. He says, “We delighted to share with you our lives.” Why? “Because you had become so dear to us.”

One of the fringe benefits of ministry is that you grow close to others. As a mother bonds with her infant child, you grow in your love for people. You begin to love them with the love of Christ. They become dear to you, and you delight to serve them. You share your life as well as the gospel.

C. You must be willing to work hard and sacrifice for others (9)

And then thirdly, you must be willing to work hard and sacrifice for others. Paul writes in verse 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. (1 Thessalonians 2:9)

Once again Paul could have accepted financial support from the Thessalonians. He says elsewhere that Christian workers should be compensated for their work. But he chose not to be a financial burden to the Thessalonians.

Paul was a tentmaker by trade. Most people had to work a full day to pay for food and lodging. Paul did that, and then he preached the

gospel as well. He worked night and day. This was both toil and hardship for him. Toil emphasizes the weariness of the work, hardship the difficulty of the work. It wasn't easy supporting himself while carrying on full time ministry. But Paul did it out of love for the Thessalonians. It was yet another proof that his love and concern for them was real.

So, that's our second principle for effective ministry. Effective ministry requires genuine love and concern for people. 1) You must deal gently with people. 2) You must share your life as well as the gospel. 3) You must be willing to work hard and sacrifice for others. Effective ministry is based on both truth and love.

III. Effective ministry requires godly example and exhortation (10-12)

And then thirdly, effective ministry requires godly example and exhortation. Just as God is truth, so you cannot minister effectively without truth; and God is love, so you cannot minister effectively without love; so also, God is holy, and therefore you cannot minister effectively apart from holiness.

A. You must live a godly life as an example for others (10)

First of all, you must live a godly life as an example to others. Paul writes in verse 10:

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:10)

Paul set a godly example for the Thessalonian believers. Here in verse ten he calls both the Thessalonians and God as witnesses that he and his companions lived in a manner which was holy, righteous and blameless.

In the original language these are not adjectives describing their lives, but rather adverbs describing their behavior. They behaved holily, righteously and blamelessly among the Thessalonians. Paul

is not asking them to affirm matters of inner purity which they could not see, but rather public actions which they witnessed and observed.

Our actions define our character. Holiness speaks of your devotion to God. Righteousness deals more with your moral conduct and dealings with people. Blamelessness speaks of your public reputation. In all these areas Paul and his companion set a godly example for the Thessalonians.

Personal godliness is essential to effective ministry. Too many pastors with a firm commitment to the truth and genuine love for people have still ruined their ministries by failures in this area. We must practice what we preach, or we lose all credibility, and the message we proclaim suffers in the process. In order to minister effectively you must live a godly life as an example for others.

B. You must encourage others to live a godly life also (11-12)

But you must not only live a godly life yourself. You must encourage others to live a godly life also. Look at verses 11-12 where Paul writes:

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. (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12)

Paul not only modeled the example of a godly life. He also exhorted the Thessalonians to live a godly life themselves. The whole purpose of ministry is to help people live godly lives which bring praise, honor and glory to God. Setting the example is necessary, but it is not enough. We must encourage and urge others to live godly lives as well.

Paul says he dealt with each of the Thessalonians as a father deals with his own children. The wise father knows what each of his children needs and works with them accordingly. In the same way we must adopt a personal, individual approach to ministry. Jesus

ministered to the crowds, but he never lost sight of the individual. You must encourage those who are discouraged, you must comfort those who are distressed, and you must urge all believers to live lives worthy of God.

What is a life worthy of God? Look at what God has done for you. He created you. He saved you. He calls you into his kingdom and glory. Only a life lived for the glory of God is worthy of such grace.

CONCLUSION: We are all called to be ministers for Christ. This morning we have learned three vital lessons concerning effective ministry

1) God is truth, and therefore you cannot minister effectively apart from truth. Our message, motives and methods must all be true. If your message is not true it cannot save. If your motives are not pure, then you lack God's approval and blessing. If your methods are dishonest, then you displease God.

2) God is love, and therefore you cannot minister effectively apart from love. God deals gently with us. And he calls us to deal gently with others. God shared his very life with us. He sent his Son, not simply a message via the prophets. God shared his life with us, and he calls us to share our lives as well as the gospel. God made the ultimate sacrifice when he sent his Son to die for our sins. He calls us to work hard and sacrifice for others.

3) God is holy, and therefore you cannot minister effectively apart from holiness. Without godly living your message has no credibility. Without godly exhortation your message has no ultimate purpose or meaning. Once again, the whole purpose of ministry is to help people live godly lives which bring praise, honor and glory to God.

These are the principles for effective ministry. If you leave even one of them out of the equation, your ministry will suffer accordingly. Effective ministry for Christ is based on truth, love and holiness. No matter what your ministry in the church, you will multiply your effectiveness for Christ when you apply these three principles. May God help you apply this word to your life as you seek to minister for him.