

1st THESSALONIANS

2:1-12

Introduction

Multitasking is a buzz-word you hear businesses using more and more these days. It is a management concept that assumes employees can accomplish *multiple tasks* at the same time. In practical terms it means that people are getting laid-off and you are expected to do their jobs as well as yours!

Multitasking is nothing new. The apostle Paul did it on his missionary journeys. He said to the Thessalonians (in verse nine),

1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

The word "laboring" means *working for wages*, especially at a *trade*. Paul worked to support himself in order to not be a financial burden to these brand new believers. From Acts 18:3 we learn that Paul knew the trade of tentmaking - literally 'tent-tailoring.' He was a tent-tailor by day and a minister of the Gospel the rest of the time.

His work as a minister of the Gospel called for further multitasking. He found himself preaching... teaching... pastoring... counseling... administrating... visiting the saints... And all the other delightful duties of being a servant of God.

Our text focuses on two particular tasks as illustrations – one more appropriate among unbelievers, the other more appropriate among believers:

1. In verses one through six Paul likened his task to that of a **steward** when he said (in verse four) he had been "entrusted with the Gospel" among unbelievers.
2. In verses seven through twelve Paul likened his task to that of a **parent** by referring to himself as a "mother" and a "father" imparting life to the believers.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Among Unbelievers You Are A Steward Entrusted With The Gospel, and #2 Among Believers You Are A Parent Imparting The Gospel.

#1 Among Unbelievers You Are A Steward
Entrusted With The Gospel
(v1-6)

First century readers would recognize the illustration of a steward as soon as they heard the word "entrusted." A steward (sometimes called a householder) was a person put in charge of all the affairs of the household. A biblical example would be the Old Testament character Joseph. Sold as a slave to the Egyptian Potiphar, his master saw how God prospered everything Joseph did. The Bible says Potiphar "made [Joseph] overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand" (Genesis 39:4).

Every Christian is a steward of the Gospel. We are entrusted with the great treasure of the knowledge of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We are called upon to distribute the treasure among unbelievers.

As we work through verses one through six you will be given the principles for good stewardship of the Gospel. You're going to notice that most of these opening verses are stated negatively. They describe what Paul and his companions did not do as good stewards. It seems that Paul was under personal attack in the Church at Thessalonica. Attack the messenger and you can undermine the message. One of the reasons for writing this letter was to answer these attacks, and Paul did it by pointing to his faithful stewardship of the Gospel among unbelievers.

We can identify at least four principles in these verses: A faithful steward is concerned about his *manner*, his *message*, his *motives*, and his *methods*.

Your manner as God's steward:

1 Thessalonians 2:1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.
1 Thessalonians 2:2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

"Suffered" and "spitefully treated at Philippi" was an understatement. "Suffered" refers to the physical suffering. Paul and Silas had been publicly flogged, then thrown into prison with their feet in stocks. "Spitefully treated" means they were shamed: Arrested on a false charge, stripped of their clothes and beaten publicly, all without the due process of Roman law.

Coming to Thessalonica you might think they would be a little more cautious preaching the Gospel. Paul said they were not. Their "coming" was "not in vain," meaning it was not *empty* or watered-down from fear. Instead they were "bold in our God to speak" the "Gospel of God."

They were bold even though there was "much conflict." There were no less external dangers in Thessalonica; in fact they were forced out of the city after only about three or four weeks of ministry.

Whenever you share the Gospel among unbelievers you run the risk of shame and/or suffering. As a faithful steward you are to remain bold.

Your message as God's steward:

1 Thessalonians 2:3 For our exhortation *did* not *come* from error...

"Exhortation" refers to the message of the missionaries. They were among unbelievers urging them to repent and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. They were offering them eternal life. Their message "did not come from error." The Gospel is the truth.

Paul's attackers probably tried to lump him in with other traveling religious leaders and philosophers. *Not possible!* His message was the truth; Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to know God except through His death and resurrection.

The message is "the Gospel of God," meaning that it originates with God. It is His message; you are only the messenger.

You must be faithful to the message. The encouragement of Revelation 22:18 & 19 is appropriate: "If any man shall add [to the

words of this Book], God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life..."

Your motives as God's steward:

1 Thessalonians 2:3 For our exhortation *did not come* from error or **uncleanness**...

"Uncleanness" refers to Paul's motives for bringing them the Gospel. For example: It could refer to impure physical motives. Most of the popular religions in the first century promoted and praised sexual immorality. Traveling "ministers" of these false religions taught that there was spiritual maturity in premarital and extramarital sex. Many of the temples were funded by the services of temple prostitutes. The so-called ministers themselves often convinced their female followers to have sex with them. It was easy to attack Paul in a similar way by saying his motives for preaching the Gospel were probably impure on some level.

He answered the attack by simply pointing out it was not true. He could point out it was not true **only because it was not true!** That sounds redundant, and it is. But it reminds you to have right motives so that when you are attacked you can honestly say "*It's not true!*"

A few years back I sat in a meeting where a person attacked me by claiming I was exercising cult-like mind powers over them. It would have been funny if it wasn't so tragic.

Your methods as God's steward:

1 Thessalonians 2:3 For our exhortation *did not come* from error or uncleanness, nor *was it* in deceit.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

1 Thessalonians 2:5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness - God *is* witness.

1 Thessalonians 2:6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Several words in these verses describe methods of ministry Paul did not use:

1. He did not use "deceit." The word is used of trying to catch fish with a baited hook. In other words, Paul did not try to lure anyone to Jesus under false pretenses.
2. He did not use "flattering words." I once read that a flatterer is someone who manipulates rather than communicates. It can also refer to a style of oratory that seeks to gain something from the hearers. Flattery is a form of lying and has no place in the Gospel.
3. He did not use "a cloak of covetousness." Preaching the Gospel was not (and should never be) a means for getting rich!
4. He "did not seek glory from men." He had no personal ambitions. He did not see the Gospel as a means to further his reputation or expand his influence as a minister. Paul was not building a religious empire or franchise.

Everything he said is all the more powerful when you realize that Paul was an "apostle" with incredible spiritual authority. He "might have made demands," but instead he conducted himself in a manner worthy of Jesus.

How do you analyze yourself to see if you are a good and faithful steward? We read within these verses, "not as pleasing men, but God Who tests our hearts" (verse 4). "Tests" refers to both a *constant* and *continuing* process of testing. There is a long tradition in the Bible of asking God to test your heart – to *review* your life and *reveal* what is there. Then, too, you must have the awareness that you will one day stand alone before your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There He will reveal and review your finished work as His steward. Looking ahead to that glorious encounter should keep you on task as His steward.

Paul was more than just the steward over the household. His relationship with the Thessalonians was far more precious to him, so he next likened himself to their parents.

#2 Among Believers You Are A Parent Imparting The Gospel (v7-12)

When Paul uses the illustration of the parent – whether the mother or the father – it is not to command authority over them or demand

respect from them. It is the qualities of being a mother or a father that he applies to his ministry among believers.

You see the qualities of a **mother** in verses seven and eight:

1 Thessalonians 2:7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

"Gentle" is not a word we normally associate with leadership... But it is a mark of spiritual strength. Jesus described Himself as gentle (Matthew 11:29); gentleness is listed among the qualities of Christian maturity in the pastoral epistles. It means *mild* and *kind* and indicates that there is nothing harsh or heavy-handed in your dealings.

You are to be as gentle among believers as a "nursing mother" is to "her own children." A nursing mom has "an affectionate longing" for her baby. She not only has a duty to feed her baby, she desires to do so. She's not a day-care worker; she's not working for wages; there is no mother's union. Her baby is "dear" to her and she sacrifices her own life for it.

The particular application of this illustration is captured by the word "impart." The mother literally imparts her own life to her baby as she *takes-in* food, *transforms* food, and *transfers* food.

Gentleness and affection among believers begins, then, with taking in food. Your food is, of course, God's Word – the Bible. But it's not enough to simply take in good food; you also need to avoid bad food. When you are nursing you are careful what you eat... What medicines you take... What you drink...

You and I fail in our responsibilities as nursing moms if we take in things that could be harmful to other believers. We should be just as careful as we would if we were nursing a baby.

Gentleness and affection among believers is furthered as you transform food. You take in food, then your body digests it so it can be used to further your life. God's Word is food that needs to be

digested to further your spiritual life. The result is a constant spiritual transformation of your thinking that affects your living.

Gentleness and affection among believers is furthered as you transfer food. Food produces energy to accomplish work. God's Word gives you energy to accomplish His spiritual work. *Get busy for God!* You don't want to have spiritual indigestion.

In verses nine, ten, and eleven the illustration changes to that of the other parent – the **father**. Again I want to remind you that Paul is not using this illustration to command authority or to demand respect. It is the qualities of being a father he wants to apply to your life among believers. Those qualities can be seen in the father's *work, walk, and words*.

The work of a father:

1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

"Laboring day and night" refer to Paul and his companions working to support themselves so as not to be a burden to the new believers. He wanted them to know that the Gospel was a gift to them and that, though costly, it was free.

"Laboring day and night" also describes the father who works hard to maintain his household.

A mother protects; a father provides. We have coined the term "deadbeat dad" to describe a father who refuses to support his children. We don't want to be deadbeat spiritual fathers by expecting other believers to do the work of the ministry.

The walk of a father:

1 Thessalonians 2:10 You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;

"Devoutly" describes your private devotion toward God. Your own relationship with the Lord in private is key.

"Justly" describes your public duties toward others, to treat them honestly, fairly, and without favoritism.

"Blamelessly" means no charge against you can stick. It is the result of being devout and just.

Fathers ought to live so that they are good examples to their children. Your kids may not always follow your good example; but you should not give them a bad example to follow. The same holds in the spiritual realm. We saw in our last study the importance and power of personal example. A bad spiritual example can cause harm.

The words of a father:

1 Thessalonians 2:11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children,

"Exhorted" means *to come alongside* to encourage. It has to do with focusing on the proper behavior. You are to encourage believers to do the right thing – just as a father would encourage his son or daughter to do the right thing.

"Comforted" is similar to exhorted except it has the further meaning of inspiring your children. It's not enough to tell your kids what's right and wrong. You need to inspire them that what is right is also good for them and will result in blessing. You are to comfort other believers by inspiring them to continue what is good, to look forward to the blessings to come at the end of their life's course.

"Charged" means to *witness* or *testify* from your own experiences. We joke about telling kids what went on "back in my days..." But that's the idea!

Back in my day, we didn't have fancy health-food restaurants. Every day we ate lots of easily recognizable animal parts, along with potatoes.

Back in my day, we didn't have hand-held calculators. We had to do addition on our fingers. To subtract, we had to have some fingers amputated.

Back in my day, we didn't get that disembodied, slightly ticked-off voice saying 'Doors closing.' We got on the train, the doors closed, and if your hand was sticking out, it scraped along the tunnel all the way to the next station and it was a bloody stump at the end. But the base fare was only a dollar.

Back in my day, we didn't have water. We had to smash together our own hydrogen and oxygen atoms.

Back in my day, we didn't have virtual reality. If a one-eyed razorback barbarian warrior was chasing you with an ax, you just had to hope you could outrun him.

Back in my day, they hadn't invented electricity. We had to watch television by candlelight.

You can only exhort and comfort to the extent that the things you share are real to you; that they 'work' for you. Christianity cannot be theoretical.

Conclusion

The goal of your multitasking is in verse twelve:

1 Thessalonians 2:12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

"Walk" means *walking around* and refers to your everyday conduct. "Worthily" means *weight*, as in a measurement of value, like the carat weight of a precious gemstone. You are to walk around everyday with a weight that is appropriate to your value as a child of God. You might even ask yourself of your desires and decisions, "*Is it worthy?*"

"Calls you into His own kingdom and glory" looks forward to the Second Coming of Jesus. He will return to this earth and establish upon it a real kingdom that He will rule from Jerusalem for one thousand years.

In the mean time you are preparing to be on earth with Jesus to help Him rule and reign.

What will you do exactly? You can't say for sure... Which is why multitasking is so important as a training tool. You're a steward... You're a mother... You're a father... And there are many other illustrations throughout God's Word.

All of them are preparing you for the glorious future appearing of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.