

Fatherly Ministry, Part 1—1st Thessalonians 2:10-12—6/15/2025

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Today we are going to ponder some of what it means to lead like a godly father as Paul described in 1st Thessalonians 2:10-12.

This is a sequel to my Mothers' Day message from the analogy of ministry like a godly mother in 1st Thessalonians 2:7-9.

In our world today where men's & women's roles are under attack, we need regular reminders of biblical thinking.

So I typically plan my Mothers' Day & Fathers' Day messages as refreshers in some vital basics of manhood & womanhood.

We need truth to approach them rightly & not overcorrect wrongly.

Recent influencers—even professing Christian ones—have shown the danger of overreacting to the feminization of society in ways that promote other problems.

So we must be warned by how Adam failed to lead when Eve was tempted & how he blame-shifted when God confronted his sin.

But the curse on man also warns men not to respond in tyrannical, domineering, oppressive ways.

So men need exhortations not to be lazy wimps on one extreme & not to be arrogant, oppressors on another extreme.

It's helpful to recall those extremes of male failure to guard against overcorrecting & replacing one error with another.

But we need more than corrections to the results of sin's curse—we need changes in our relationships that start with God & His Word.

So today we will focus on some of the God-ordained awareness & orientation that are required to lead like a godly father.

We'll note 2 descriptions of fatherly ministry from 1st Thessalonians 2:10 & then next week we'll add 2 more from verses 11-12.

With that in mind, let's direct our minds to God's Word by turning to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian church.

Turn there & let's read 1st Thessalonians 2:1-20 to get started. [READ]

Recall on Mothers' Day that we said this chapter is Paul's defense of his genuine concern for the Thessalonians.

Since some influencers had come in & criticized Paul, much of this chapter contrasts Paul's motives & methods with those others.

At the center of Paul's concern was that he wanted these believers to know how much he truly loved them.

As verse 20 said, they were his *glory and joy*, and he was thankful to God for them and he had poured out his life to serve them.

His gentle, loving service for them was like that of a godly, young mother of a nursing infant as verses 7-9 indicated.

And his exemplary, purposeful leading of them was like a godly father, as depicted in verses 10-12.

Since Paul was single, his application of motherly & fatherly traits shows us how these virtues also apply in other ways.

Yet his connection of specific virtues with motherhood or fatherhood shows that those virtues are more pronounced in those roles.

So fathers should take special note of what God's Spirit led Paul to write as characteristic of fathers.

And boys—you should perk up and listen for what God wants you to grow toward as you grow into a man.

Yet it will also be evident how these truths matter for everyone.

1st note that leading like a godly father prioritizes exemplary living.

Point #1—fatherly ministry, leading like a godly father,
prioritizes exemplary living, living like a good example.

Realize & don't miss the importance exemplary living.

And when I say exemplary—I do not mean perfect—I mean as
a good example—Paul's life was a good example to follow.

Part of a solid example is humble repentance & faith & growth.

Read 1st Thessalonians 2:10-11 again to get into this. [READ]

Paul appealed to what the Thessalonians had witnessed—he said, 'you are witnesses'—and he noted that God was a witness too.

Then he added in verse 11—just as you know—to confirm that
the Thessalonians had seen & heard this & could not deny
knowing & affirming what Paul described of his example.

Then the end of verse 11 draws in the analogy to a father with his own children to frame these verses with that emphasis on fatherly ministry.

So as Paul reminded the Thessalonians of him speaking like a
father, he pointed to his life that supported such speech.

Paul's verbal ministry was rooted in his own personal example.

His lifestyle backed up & bolstered the words he said.

And please note that order because one of the wrong reactions against
feminism promotes being the strongest & loudest macho man who tells
everyone else what to do with little concern for his own example.

But the biblical model of male leadership does NOT teach that
it does not matter how we live or what we do.

So look guys—if you are tempted to be frustrated by how your wife or
kids or others are not following in the ways they should, first examine
if your own example is one that you would want to follow.

Sometimes I find that my own attitude or tone or demeanor is
what is making it so hard for my family to respond rightly.

Of course, our failures do not excuse anyone else's sin, but our sins do
make what we say that much harder to hear.

And we know this, don't we?—no one likes a hypocrite—a
person's example is a huge factor in how we listen to them.

If I believe that you truly live what you say, then I am far more likely
to respect you & hear your perspective.

And if I also believe that you care about me, that you love me,
that you want to help with what's good, then that is so inviting.

This is so simple & yet so important that we don't want to overlook it.

Men—this is obvious, but we need to hear it—if you act like an
arrogant tyrant or angry dictator or selfish boss at home, do not
be surprised if no one respects you or wants to follow you.

Your example matters—you must prioritize exemplary living.

And I'm not talking about an example of ourselves we form in
our own minds; I mean what God knows & others testify to.

As Paul defended his genuine concern in contrast to the false teachers
who opposed him, he appealed to his example before those believers.

They knew Paul well enough that they could give eyewitness
testimony of his character & faithfulness.

And God also knew—he added that God was witness too.

Paul could confidently appeal to the witness of the gathered church because he knew that God was also the chief witness.

So stop & realize the power of Paul's clean conscience before God.

The boldness with which Paul spoke flowed from the assurance he had before God that he was not hiding anything.

Proverbs 28:1 says, "*The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.*"

Think about that—what is being contrasted in Proverbs 28:1?

The wicked flee when no one is pursuing because they've done wicked things & they cannot hide them & they flee out of fear of being caught.

But *the righteous are bold as a lion* because they are not hiding anything & their conscience is clean before God & others.

That's how Paul could speak & write with such boldness as he addressed people who had watched his life carefully.

So we must wake up & realize that others are watching & are always impacted no matter how alone we think we are.

The most important other Person is God Himself—He is witness.

So please get this—you are NEVER alone.

That can be comforting or convicting—but it is always clarifying.

You are never alone both in relation to God & in your impact on others because everything you do—even when you are alone—has an impact on who you are when you are not alone.

You cannot be online alone viewing others as objects of your lust & think that does not affect the way you view everyone else all the time.

That warps your perspective to view & value people based on appearance rather than as fellow bearers of God's image.

And you cannot live for money or popularity in your heart without it twisting you into a user of people rather than a lover of people.

And just think of who might be discouraged or destroyed if God revealed what He knows of you in secret.

If you don't want that, then always know that you are not alone.

But in contrast, think also of who can be encouraged by you.

The importance of examples must not be merely a warning.

It must first also be a motivation to be a good example.

So stop thinking selfishly & step toward the huge blessing you can be.

Your faithful presence & your smile & singing & greeting & serving can affect every single member of this church.

The way you pray for others can impact your love for them.

And listen, young people, this can also encourage you because you are being watched by younger kids & kids your age & by adults of all ages & you can be a huge encouragement.

As 1st Timothy 4:12 says, "*Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.*"

Your life can show how a believer lives & can influence others even if you don't realize it.

Simply coming to Christ ought to transform your life so much that you become an example to others as so many of you already are.

That was true of the Thessalonians as Paul noted in this letter in 1st Thessalonians 1:6-7—turn there & read that. [READ]

Speaking of the results of their conversion, Paul noted how they became an example to others even as new believers.

So this has application to each of us no matter our place in life.

But we must note especially that fathers are examples—examples of how a man ought to walk with God & treat his wife & pray & study Scripture, examples of loving & leading & shepherding others, examples of faithful diligence in working & providing for the family, examples in giving to God & to others, & examples of trustworthiness & consistency in discipline & promises & all of life.

And spiritual fathers in the church can be examples in all those ways in all of life for those who lacked it in their homes.

Spiritual fathers are those that lead others in the faith, whether by instruction or personal discipleship or casual fellowship.

But being a good mentor or leader requires pointing others ultimately & only toward following Christ.

We follow good examples as they follow Christ, like Paul said in 1st Corinthians 11:1, “*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*”

And realize that’s how it happens in real time—that’s how Christians grow—we learn first from those we watch up close.

So when 1st Corinthians 11:1 says “*be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ*”, it’s elevating the importance of examples.

We learn habits from the people we look up to & follow, from the people who we expose ourselves to & listen to & watch.

We learn thought patterns & habits & values & vocabulary.

In 1st Corinthians 4:15-17, Paul called his readers back to the example they saw in him & he sent Timothy to model that.

1st Corinthians 4:15-17 says, “*For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*”

To refocus the Corinthians on Gospel basics, Paul wrote them words but he also sent them an example in Timothy.

He gave them Timothy’s in-person example as a model of his own example to refresh them in how to follow Christ.

That’s why this point reminds us that we must spend time with people—we must let others into our regular routines.

Life is not all experienced in scheduled blocks of efficient productivity for measurable progress counted in a calendar or spreadsheet.

We learn through life-on-life example, walking together & working together & serving together & just observing others.

Paul made similar appeals in 2nd Thessalonians 3:7-9 & Acts 20:18ff as he pointed to his example as instructive for others.

So we must build bandwidth into our lives to let people into the spaces of regular rhythms where we are not formally teaching.

Unplanned interruptions can be pivotal discipleship investments.

I know that’s hard & I’m not claiming I’m great at it, but that’s why I needed the reminder even as I studied this week.

A significant influence on parenting for me & Melanie was from our pastor & his wife in FL when we were newlyweds with no children.

They were not trying to teach us how to parent, but they did.

That's why Paul exhorted Timothy several times in his letters to him as a young pastor to consider his life example.

1st Timothy 4:16 says *Pay close attention to yourself & to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.*

We as leaders must think of both ourselves and those we lead.

We must watch our example because often more is learned from what is caught from example than from what is taught.

We deal with our own issues in trying to help others deal with theirs.

As parents, we must always be aware of how important our example is when we are correcting our children's sin.

We can lead them & others to God by how we model God's character.

God can use that in more ways than we may imagine because people may not even know they are being influenced by you.

So never underestimate the power of your example for spiritual good.

It's constant: we never clock out of being a spiritual influencer.

And if we understand the importance of being an example, we should also consider the importance of finding & following good examples.

As Paul said in Philippians 3:17, "*Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.*"

And again in Philippians 4:9, he wrote, "*The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things.*"

1st Peter 5:3 tells elders to *be examples to the flock* because people need good role models & discipleship relationships.

So another way to apply this point is to seek solid models to mimic.

Strive to learn from & serve & watch godly men & women.

Listen to them & ask questions to gain insight & open your life up for questions & counsel & correction & instruction.

But as we ponder this 1st point, it might feel overwhelming both in how to be an example & how to find good examples.

You might wonder how to start or to simplify this all-encompassing reality of being a spiritual role model & finding spiritual mentors.

So we can be grateful for how the rest of verse 10 helps us.

We can be thankful that Paul described the ways his example was observable to the Thessalonian believers.

And this gives us a 2nd point about fatherly ministry today, a 2nd focus not to miss in leading like a godly father.

Point #2—prioritize transcendent calibration—and kids, I know those are big words so let me explain what I mean & even spell them.

Transcendent—T-R-A-N-S-C-E-N-D-E-N-T—that means out of this world, above this world, superior to anything else.

We want what is from God as perfect as the divine standard for our calibration, which means our evaluation & adjustment, our tuning & setting of how we should think & function.

Calibration—C-A-L-I-B-R-A-T-I-O-N—is like our constant setting & resetting our standards & measurements.

We want to be constantly calibrating ourselves transcendently, meaning constantly resetting our lives by God's standards.

Point #2—fatherly ministry prioritizes transcendent calibration.

Paul described his example with 3 adverbs in verse 10, 3 ways he lived.

Read 1st Thessalonians 2:10 again for those -ly words. [READ]

That's 3 transcendent calibrations: devoutly, uprightly, & blamelessly.

Paul appealed to God's testimony because these descriptions point his relationship to God & God's standards.

Paul wasn't claiming perfection, just faithfulness in these areas.

That's why he said how devoutly & uprightly & blamelessly—how faithful & exemplary his behavior was in these areas.

Paul appealed to their witness & God's witness of his behavior toward them—toward those believers.

Paul wasn't focused on what the unbelievers thought—they were already twisting the truth and slandering him and lying.

It wasn't that Paul did not care about unbelievers, but unbelievers do not to judge ministry accurately.

So Paul was mainly concerned with his behavior to those who should understand him, the believers.

The believers understood what he did & why & could attest to that.

First, Paul said he behaved devoutly, meaning he was pious, religious, devout, & holy in his commitment to God.

That started inside & God was the best witness of it.

God knew how Paul prayed regularly and continually.

God knew Paul's thankfulness & worship & heartfelt praise.

God knew Paul's heart was motivated by God's glory.

God knew that Paul wasn't filled with selfishness & deceit & personal pride like the false teachers who were slandering him.

God knew Paul's devotion was Godward.

Paul was diligent, practiced, fastidious, & religious in his pursuit of God inwardly and personally.

His religion wasn't mere external ritual as a show for others.

Paul was driven by a heart for God, a singular love & worship of God.

God could testify to that—and so could the Thessalonians.

They could look at his life and agree that he was exacting and painstaking in his daily quest to love, worship, obey and serve God.

They could attest to Paul's devout holiness for God.

Paul's life was one driven by his personal communion with God.

He spoke to God through prayer & God spoke to him through His Word & through the apostolic revelations Paul received.

So as you think about being a good example, you have to start with your devotion, your personal relationship with Almighty God.

You can't be a godly example to others unless you meet with God first and meet with God regularly.

Then your example is not a matter of trying to please others or just be an example of how to have a happy life here.

If you start with you own personal faithfulness in walking with God, then being a good example will be a natural outflow of that intense desire to worship and serve God with your life.

That's why our examination & evaluation of ourselves must be transcendent, it must start with God.

We must calibrate & recalibrate—set & reset ourselves—in relation to God or we will drift off course.

Our behavior starts in our hearts and we will always find areas where we are failing if we are honest.

So we should always be led back to our unending need for God's grace to us in Jesus Christ.

We can only approach God without being cast off into punishment because Jesus paid sin's punishment for us in His death on the cross.

That is the foundation of our devotion to God that feeds our example in walking with God.

We start with & return to the Gospel that tells us we are sinners who can never be good enough for God to welcome us based on our works.

Even when God has changed our lives & does use us as a good example for others, we know it is only by His Spirit's work in us to do what would not come naturally for us.

So we never approach God based on our own merits or efforts.

We always & only approach God through faith in His free mercy through Jesus' perfect life & sacrificial death & victorious resurrection.

And we live devoutly because we trust this glorious & gracious God as He has welcomed us in Christ & we want to follow Him closely.

We want to praise Him because He is worthy & we want His wisdom & power to walk in His ways by His Spirit.

When we know the true God as the majestic, mind-blowing Trinity who is so gracious & good, we want to live zealously for Him.

Then a desire for being a good example flows out of a heart resting in all that God is for in Jesus Christ.

I say that because we must put Paul's words here in the context of the Gospel and not as mere behavior modification or self-improvement.

This is a relationship with God founded upon the work of Christ and fueled by the power of Christ's Spirit.

When that relationship is right, it flows out in a life worth following.

Yet that takes time to cultivate & constantly calibrate.

Every relationship requires the investment of time spent together for it to continue and flourish—and that is especially true with God.

So we must discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

Living devoutly requires discipline to spend time alone with God in prayer and His Word.

That is the fountain from which the Christian life flows.

Go to that fountain & drink from it daily & fill yourself with God so that you can have something to spill out to others.

And in that way, you will be a devout example.

Not only will you be devout, but like Paul you will also be upright.

Paul stated 2ndly that he behaved uprightly or righteously.

That the same root word for righteousness, which is conformity to the moral law of God, moral integrity according to God's standards.

That flows the inside out, from heart to speech to behavior.

A righteous example lives in conformity to God's design for life, in accord with God's mandates and revelation.

It involves a right relating to God—loving Him with your all heart, mind, soul, and strength and loving Him more than all else and not having idols.

And it also involves a right relating to other people—loving your neighbor as yourself, considering others more important, not coveting or showing greed or jealousy or bitterness or anger but having genuine love and kindness and graciousness and just dealings with others.

Behaving righteously is behaving rightly, behaving as God expects you to behave as He has revealed in His Word.

Of course, this does not mean we live perfectly or sinlessly or that our own righteousness could earn us God's favor.

That would be contrary to the Gospel.

Rather this is a general pattern of upright living that is evident.

Such righteous obedience to God's Word can be generally observable.

Yet this also requires constant evaluating & resetting ourselves by God's transcendent standards in His Word.

Just as our devotional life of prayer & pursuit of God need regular transcendent calibration, so does our righteous living.

Then 3rdly, transcendent calibration is needed in relationships with others, in what Paul described as blamelessness.

Living blamelessly is living without warrant for anyone to accuse you of something, to bring a charge against you that would stick as true.

Our work, our home, our ministry, should not have any blots or stains or marks that truly speak against us.

Our example needs to be whole, complete, without any blemish.

That is connected to the first two descriptions, but this term highlights integrity particularly in relation to others.

Think of this—if your child or friend or neighbor copied everything you did, would that be good or would you find some blame with it?

Or ask this—what would your home or workplace or our church or nation be like if everyone followed your example?

If there are ways that might be bad, then are you living blamelessly?

To be useful in ministry, our example matters & we can evaluate it in how we live devoutly, uprightly & blamelessly.

So calibrate your life transcendentally in devotion to God, in response to His commands & in relationships with others.

Weigh your inner life with God, your faithfulness to God's Word, and your trustworthiness in relationships with others.

All of us need to ponder the importance of examples, both the examples we follow & the example we set for others to follow.

As God's design for the family has weakened, there is a lack of godly examples of husbands & fathers & wives & mothers.

There are far too many bad examples—but if you know Christ then you can be a shining light of the right kind of example.

So we need to look around us & reach out & invest in others.

That's one of values of Care Groups & gatherings for men & for ladies & mentors in our youth ministries—because we all profit from relationships where we can learn from good examples.

And many of you are being godly examples as spiritual fathers & mothers for others in this church and I praise God for that.

At some level, this should be normal in relationships in the church—and there does not need to be a hierarchy of disciplers & disciples.

One doesn't have to be the official teacher or leader and another the official follower.

This can happen mutually between Christian friends in all kinds of relationships and scenarios in mutual discipleship.

But the example of spiritual fathers cannot be overestimated.

And if you think that you have failed too much & not been a good example, then maybe others can learn from those hard lessons too.

You can be an example of humility by sharing something that might caution others not to be like you used to be.

And others can also learn from the trials we walk through.

We must remember that our trials are not merely about us.

All the people around us are watching us in our trials & God is working in us & also through us with all those who know us.

Often God keeps us blind to all that He's doing so we don't get proud or fight Him for credit for His good work.

But we can be assured that He is working.

So as we study this, we should step back to ask why we do what we do & whose example we are following.

Perhaps we've learned from faithful examples & can honor that today by thanking God for your father or for your spiritual fathers.

Fathers' Day is certainly a great time to do so.

If you didn't have a faithful dad as you grew up, I'm sorry—that's sad & I pray that you can find faithful spiritual fathers in the church.

Thank God for spiritual fathers & thank them today also.

But in other ways we may need to turn from bad examples we've followed & search out good examples to follow.

Or maybe you need to make yourself more available to be a spiritual father or mentor to someone who's never had one.

However we lead or follow others, we must ultimately seek to know God in Christ & in His Word because that's the transcendent calibration that will transform us most faithfully & fruitfully.

We must always run to Christ to remember that His life is the holy & righteous & blameless one that we could never attain.

And His life is counted as ours through faith as He also washes away all the guilt of our sin & empowers us to walk in newness of life.

That's the Gospel that fuels our devotion & exemplary living.

Then we pray that we can say to others—*you are witnesses, & so is God, how devoutly & uprightly & blamelessly we behaved toward you.*

Let's make that our prayer as we close.