

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

People Of The Kingdom

PART

7

TITLE

Loving In Responsibility

SCRIPTURE

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12



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Well, good morning, Providence. I am Bryan and I have the joy of serving as one of the pastors here on staff. And one of my pastoral responsibilities happens to be over men's ministry. So I get the opportunity to plug something that we did a couple of weeks ago. If you were with us on Father's Day, then you may have picked up a small resource that we wanted to gift to not just the dads of the church, but also to all men that were middle school or older in our church. It was a small book. And if you did not get one on that day, because you weren't here, you just didn't pick one up from the table, there are a few left at the welcome desk, and we would invite you to grab that.

But with that resource came an invitation. And that invitation was to join us, starting this Tuesday for five weeks at breakfast in order to walk through the content of the book, the biblical content of the book. And so we want to invite you to do that if you have not jumped on that opportunity and you're able. You can register for that study online at [pray.org/mensstudy](http://pray.org/mensstudy). And you can grab a book. There should be an insert in it with the same information, but we would love to see you on Tuesday if you're able to make that. We love the word of God and we believe strongly that our lives should be centered on it. And then God has given us intent and purpose. And it's what we want to look at when we do that.

If you're a guest with us today, I know you've been welcomed already by feel, but I just want to say again, thank you. You honor us with your presence. And I hope that over the course of this morning, that you might be challenged and encouraged by what you hear. We love the word, and we want to see what God has to say to us in it and how that impacts how we live for our Providence family. Obviously I'm not the one that's normally up here. And so we want to continue to pray for Pastor Bryan and for his family, as he is away on sabbatical through the remainder of the summer.

As we gathered this morning, we gather free to do so without the threat of censorship or the level of intense persecution that many of our brothers and sisters around this world face regularly. And the freedom that we enjoy here is a gift that we should never grow tired of expressing gratitude for. And so this morning, before we open up God's word and continue in our series on the book of I Thessalonians, I want to pause for a minute and just give thanks to God for all of the good gifts that he generously lavishes on us.

So let's pray. Father, we come before you this morning. And God, I just confess out of my own heart, just a deep sense of gratitude. God, there are so many ways that you bless us. God, you give us your word. We are not left in the dark to wonder who you are. We are not left in the dark to wonder who you've made us to be. But you've generously given us your word that we might know you. And not only that, that we might be drawn to you through the gospel that it proclaims and the reality of the work that you've done through your son. God, we're thankful. God, we don't have to wonder if we have purpose, because you woke us up this morning and we had breath in our lungs. And so we thank you for life itself.

God, would you help us to see the intent and the purpose of our lives? And God, I just expressed gratitude that in your Providence and your kindness, you caused us to be born in this time in history in this place.

Under the freedoms that we have, God, I confess too that those freedoms come with great responsibility. So will you help us as a people to lean into thankfulness for what you've done for us, but to recognize that you call us to something as well.

And even in these next few moments, would you give us eyes to see and ears to hear what you say in your word? And even more than that, God, I pray that you might give our hearts courage to live in light of what your word says. So we look to you now for those things and we pray this in a strong and powerful name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and savior. Amen.

Well, what is the purpose of your life? Could you articulate it clearly to other people? Or how about this question? Would people know what your purpose is simply by watching how you act and listening to the words that you say? As believers, we have a responsibility to live our lives with intent. Actually, regardless of whether you're a follower of Jesus Christ or not, what you do and how you do it matters. Your words and your actions impact more than just your life. They directly affect others around you. And ultimately, for all of us, whether we believe or not, our actions and our words bear witness either for or against Christ.

How we act generally flows out of who we are, like what's inside of us. So we can't long hide what's inside, because ultimately it works its way out in both the things that we do and in what we say. And likewise, how we act tells others about who we really are and whose we are. It gives testimony to what we love, to what we treasure and to what controls and even directs our lives. This is why when Paul writes a letter to Thessalonians or to anyone for that matter, because we have several of Paul's letters to churches throughout the New Testament area, he is concerned always with living in a way that reflects the principles of the kingdom of God and more importantly, of its king Jesus.

For Christ to be known as the savior and the king, the truth must be proclaimed in both our words and our actions. As we've been reminded, each week that we've opened up this letter, Paul writes to Thessalonians out of joy, that they have continued in faith, even in his absence. We know that when Paul came to Thessalonica, he preached the gospel and some believed, but they were only there a short time before they had to flee the city because people were persecuting them. And as he left, he got further away from them in distance and in time and his heart long to know whether they had clung to the faith that they had heard and received. And so he sent someone back to check on them. And that person returns to Paul with a report that not only had they embraced the gospel, but they were thriving in it. And it delighted Paul's heart.

And so he writes this letter to commend them, but also to encourage them to continue to grow in their faith and to exhort and correct them when necessary, which is a little of what we're going to see today, both a mixture of encouragement and exhortation. So let's read this passage from I Thessalonians chapter four. Now, if you came this morning and you don't have a Bible, then there ought to be one under the chair directly in front of you or to your right or your left. And if you don't own a Bible, we would love for you to and invite you to take it with you as our gift to you. As a people, we believe that we will know God best when we know

his word that he has given to us.

And so we're in the book of I Thessalonians in chapter four, and we're going to read verses nine through 12. If you're unfamiliar with the Bible, you can actually find the book of I Thessalonians by looking at the table of contents in the front. It's going to be toward the end of the Bible, but you can actually find it that way. But this is what Paul writes in his letter in this place. Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

In this portion of Paul's letter, we see Paul reminding them and us that love must be the foundation for how we live, for how we move, for how we breathe. And this is really the first point that I want us to consider today. People of the kingdom excel in love. Love is where Paul begins his exhortation. What follows this, will speak primarily toward how we conduct ourselves within the context of our daily responsibilities, namely our work. But love must be the motivation for why we both work the way we work and for how we conduct ourselves with one another in the context of our work and our responsibilities.

And so Paul says, "Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another." Paul says to Thessalonians, don't need to be reminded to root everything in love, because they've been taught by God himself how to love. So why does Paul say this? And what does he mean when he says that God has been their teacher? It's really important for us to remember that Paul was a Pharisee before he was a follower of Christ. He had studied the Old Testament for years. And as a Pharisee, he'd even committed his life to knowing the word of God as they had it, the Old Testament, and following that word and protecting it. So when he says the words you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, he likely would've been remembering passages like Isaiah 54:13, all of your children shall be taught by the Lord and great shall be the peace of children.

Or perhaps even Jeremiah 31:33-34. This is what Jeremiah writes, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and teach his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

From the mouth of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, God had been declaring that there would come a day when people would no longer need to teach or be taught about the Lord because they would know him. Don't miss this. With the coming of Jesus Christ, this promise was ushered into reality. And the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit was at work to bring to fruition this truth among those who know Christ as their Lord and savior. Paul, as a Pharisee, knew the word of God, but he did not know God.

When Paul came face to face with Jesus Christ, everything changed. And suddenly the words that he had dedicated his life to, became real in his heart. And God was his teacher, bringing alive all of those truths. Paul knew this full well. When we hear this passage, as New Testament believers, it ought to cause us to remember the words of Christ from the 13th chapter of the gospel of John. As Jesus was teaching and preparing his disciples for his imminent departure, he said to them, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved, you also are to love one another.”

Now, Paul says you don't need to be taught to love. You already know what the word says and what Jesus said to love God with all of your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. The uniqueness of the love that Jesus commands to his disciples in John 13 is that he calls him to reflect the love that he has demonstrated to them. What's the new command, to love as he has loved. So how has Christ loved them? How has Christ loved Thessalonians? And how has Christ loved us?

Well, he's loved us with a selfless sacrificial love, an extravagant love. Sometimes shocking and often not what was expected. It was a love that was concerned for the good of others. It's a heartbeat of the gospel that Christ would come, would work to the point of persecution, would give of himself so that we might be restored to the father, sacrificially pouring out his own life that we might know God, be forgiven of our sins and restored to him.

And I think that Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that the capacity to love the way Jesus loved is only possible because they were first the recipients of that love. The only way that they can love this way or know to love this way is to have received this love through Jesus, to hear and believe the gospel. And they had. This is why John would later write in one of his epistles, “And this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. And he sent his son to be a propitiation for our sins.” Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another, because this kind of love should radically shape how we posture ourselves toward other people and how we relate to them and how we act toward them.

Love must be of primary importance. And it should not simply be maintained, but Paul is saying it should grow and grow. As we love others and we grow in Christ likeness, we should excel and love more and more, not less and less. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, your salvation should cause the capacity of your love to grow not narrow. Paul says, “I'm so proud of you. You guys are loving so well. Keep it up. Excel more and more. Love even better.” The love that Paul is calling them to is the love that Christ calls all believers to, but more importantly than that, it's the love with which Christ has loved all believers. The love God calls us to is the love that we have received from God himself. God is our teacher. It's a love that is outward focused for the good of others and the glory of Christ at its center. And this is why Paul starts with the encouragement of love. He champions it to continue more and more. It must be what drives, what he tells them to do after it. Providence, as a body of believers, there are a lot of things that people might say of us, but may we long to be a people who are known by our love. If nothing else, may we be a reflection of what Christ has done for us. Well, people of the kingdom should not only excel in love, that love should be evidenced in the way that they

act. This is the second thing that I want us to see in this letter. People of the kingdom aspire to live quiet lives. Now, sometimes I wish my children in my own home practiced to this better. Okay. So maybe that's not what Paul had in mind. So what does it mean when Paul says that he wants to encourage them to aspire to live quietly and to mind their own affairs? Is Paul saying that we should not raise our voices? That we should only speak in whispers? Some of you're saying absolutely right. Is Paul's directive concerned with the volume of our speech and our lives? Or is Paul concerned with its content and its motive and its direction and purpose? Well, I think it's the latter, but this should raise another really important question. If that's true, is Paul saying that we should not seek to do great things that might draw attention from others. And should we aspire to vocations and positions in life that aren't front and center so that we might live quietly? Is he commanding the Thessalonians and us to live lives of mediocrity to never dream and only pursue simple quiet tasks? Thankfully, no.

The whole of the scripture shows us this, Paul is not saying that as a believer, we should lack ambition. On the contrary, Paul and the rest of the holy word, remind us that God has called and equipped us for specific tasks, and that we should be content to live within his calling. Right after all, God made Abraham the father of a nation and he made David a king and he made Paul a missionary who drew the attention of the Roman empire and its ruler.

A quiet life is not an unproductive life, it's not a lazy life and it's not a life with no excitement or meaning, but a quiet life is a content life. A content life is a life that trusts sovereign rule and reign of God. It does not mean that we lack ambition. Instead, it means that we live and work with a steadiness and a joy that says that we know God has purpose and intent in all things, including our work. And it means that we don't seek attention of others as the goal of what we do though it may draw attention when we live in a way that is consistent with his word.

It also seems here that Paul is pointing toward a quietness that impacts our relationship with those around us. From what we can gather by the content of both of Paul's letters to Thessalonians, because we have two, it appears that some who believed in Jesus as their Messiah, when the gospel was preached, were so enamored by the thought of Christ second return. And we ought to long for that. We believe that he's coming back to complete what he began at his resurrection to usher in the new heaven and the new earth.

But there were some believers there in Thessalonica who were so enamored by that thought that they had abandoned normal living. They quit working and they were simply waiting for Christ to appear. And in doing so, they were becoming a burden on those who were working in the church. This can be seen in Paul's writing the warnings that he issues in his second letter to the church in Thessalonica. In that he says in the second letter in chapter three, "We hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies." Paul says it. It's here. The burden that they had placed on the community of faith was not only involving daily provision, they couldn't provide for themselves, but it also seems that it was straining their relationship with one another. And it worked itself out in how they related to one another.

Those who were idle didn't stay busy, but Paul says they were busybodies. So what does he mean? Well, they had time on their hands that they should not have had, had they been taking seriously God's call on their lives to work with purpose. An idle time turned into being busy in other people's business. Because of that, they were not living quietly. They weren't minding their own affairs. They were disruptive to those around them. And they concerned themselves instead with critique and commentary about others' lives, both within the body of Christ and the church and without in its community.

Those outside of the church apparently saw the way these individuals were living. And it left a really bad taste in their mouths with respect to Christ and to his people. Paul is encouraging them to work for the glory of the kingdom and its king. This is a third thing that I want to point out in this passage, people of the kingdom exalt Christ in their work. The ultimate purpose of our lives is to live in a way that all we do is directed toward God. And so Paul says here to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent upon no one.

When Paul says walk properly, what he has in mind here is how we conduct ourselves before God and others. He's already encouraged this earlier in this letter that we've read and looked at just a few weeks ago. He reminds them of he and his traveling companions own work and witness among them when they first came. What he says in chapter two is this, "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. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God."

Paul and his companions pattern of life was consistent with the gospel that they proclaimed and they bore witness to when they were with the Thessalonians. The manner in which we walk is how we live. And in this instance, it's also how we work. What I love about chapter four in this place in this letter is that Paul, through the inspiration of the holy spirit is giving us insight into a basic theology of work.

I realize most of you will wake up tomorrow morning and you'll step into vocational jobs that do not have as their primary purpose the proclamation of the gospel or the ministry of the church proper. Some of you will wake up tomorrow with normal life responsibilities outside of a paying job that seems thankless, and quite honestly pointless. But hear me out and hear Paul clearly, what you do matters and how you do it matters. Did you know that on average, a person will spend approximately 113,000 hours, that's 13 years of your life working? This is substantial when you realize that the only thing in life that consumes more of our time than work is sleep. All right.

On average, we will spend about 33 years of life, either sleeping or trying to sleep. Some of us spend more time trying than we actually sleep. Coincidentally, screen time, TV movies, video games, social media, it comes in at just under 11 years of our lives. It's third and time spent in the total amount of an average life.

Now, that statistic alone might be telling us something specific, but we'll have to save that for another sermon. Eating, pretty important, eating takes about four and a half years of your life. And the total of school, kids listen to this, the total of school, you should be encouraged, takes less than a year of life. That's from preschool to college graduation, post grad and doctoral work. The total sum of the average for most people is at less than a year of your life is spent there. While you may feel like all you do is school compared to all of life, that is simply a drop in the bucket.

Now why all of this? For this reason. You may feel that your work has little to do with the kingdom of God, but why would God create a context in which you would spend more of your lifetime than literally everything else outside of sleeping? You may see little or no eternal value in the things that consume a large majority of your time each day, each week, in years, but I want to suggest a different narrative. And that's some of what Paul is alluding to here in this passage. Your work matters. Do you conduct yourself in a way that you honor Christ? Are you humble and gracious and wise and honest, trustworthy, patient and careful and intentional? God in his grace made work to be full of dignity. And God in his grace made work in a way that it provides for our basic needs. God in his grace made work to be fulfilling. God in his grace made work to be an act of worship. How we work matters as much as what we do in our work. But Paul is also saying how we conduct ourselves, gives witness to an unbelieving world. Our decisions in this respect, good and bad, shape how those outside of the church view the whole family of God and the guide that we proclaim.

Paul is warning the Thessalonians that being lazy when it comes to our posture toward our responsibilities leaves a bad taste of the gospel in the mouths of those who don't believe. We should walk properly before outsiders with this goal in mind. That's the words of Jesus from the sermon on the mountain in Matthew chapter five. We ought to work in a way that others, that the world sees our good works and does what? Gives glory to the father who is in heaven. Not only is our work part of God's good design, it's a vital part of our witness. Our work generally speaking, is also how we provide for our needs. This is why Paul says work with your hands as we instructed you so that you may be dependent upon no one.

Now, Paul wants people to be intentional in pursuing work that provides for basic needs. So I want to give a caveat here and I need to say this, this in no way is to be interpreted as a harsh view toward the reality that some people may find themselves in need of basic things. In fact, this was a common reality in the context of the New Testament church and was even at some level expected so much so that what we see as a pattern in the New Testament is the early church actually rallied around those in need to care well for one another. It's part of our responsibility to do so.

So what Paul is speaking to here is not that kind of need, what Paul is speaking to here is the person who has the ability to work, who chooses not to work and presumes upon the generosity of others out of choice, not circumstance. There are two very different things. To do the latter, to choose, to be lazy in the way that we view work, and then how we do work presumes upon the grace of God, the generosity of others. And quite frankly, it's sinful. Work is a good gift from God.



This is seen in the whole of the scripture, but we really don't have to go any further than Genesis one or two. Before the fall that you realize that God, in his kindness, when he made Adam and Eve, made them with a task in mind. He gave them work to do. And it was meant to be fulfilling and meant to be honoring to them. Work is not a result of the fall. Though you may think sometimes your work is a result of the fall, it's not. The brokenness of work is certainly, and the brokenness in work is, but work itself is fundamentally good and a good gift. We were made to work. And we were made to live with intent. And both should flow out of love, the love that we have received from Christ. We will find our work fulfilling when we understand that it is an outworking of the gospel that saved us.

And so, as we close, I want to encourage you guys with two, maybe not simple things, but two things. First, let the love of God motivate your work. Do you see what you do is God's good gift to you, is equipping you and providing you with both skill and opportunity to do that thing, to have that responsibility? If not, I encourage you to consider this biblical reality and let it fuel how you approach what you do tomorrow morning and every day going forward. And then finally, honor God through how you work and in the work that you do. So how should we work? We should lean into our responsibilities in a way that we reflect the character of Christ in how we work. And we should work in a way that will allow God through the beauty of work to provide for our needs and point others toward him. In doing so, we embrace and reflect what it means to be a people of the kingdom.

So let's pray. Father, thank you. Thank you for the gift of work. God, when you knit us together, you made us with purpose. And a lot of that purpose is tied up in how we navigate this world in the context of responsibility and work. You made us for it and you made it for our good and you made it to be for your glory. So as a people, God, would you cause our hearts to wrap around that reality, to see what we do and how we do it as something that matters tremendously, because it is a reflection of your kindness to us in an overflow of the gospel that saved us, the gift of Christ that you gave to us, that we might be restored and our work might be redeemed.

God, would you help us to see that and believe it? Would you help us to live in a way that it's an overflow of what you've poured out on us and that it might draw others to you and we might work with purpose and you might be exalted in it? God would you let it be so? Let us be a people who are known by our love and let our love be reflected in how we work. We thank you for your word. And we thank you that this is only possible, because what you've done for us through Christ on the cross. And it's in his name that we pray these things, amen.



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