The Heart of Ministry- Part 1

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1 Nov 09

Let's take our Bibles tonight and open to 1 Thessalonians, chapter two. First Thessalonians, chapter two as we continue our study through this letter from the apostle Paul to the believers in the church in the city of Thessalonica. And I want to begin by reading verses one through twelve. First Thessalonians, chapter two, verses one through twelve which says, "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed- God is witness- nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from, others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection 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 very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." Well let's pray as we come to God's Word.

Lord, we're thankful for this portion of scripture. We pray, Lord, that You would give us ears to hear what You would say to us. We pray, Lord, that we would have hearts eager to receive and obey what we learn from Your word here tonight, that we might honor You in all of our service that we render to You. We commit this time to You and we thank You for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

What makes a fruitful ministry? What makes a successful ministry? Why do some churches seem to see the gospel flourish and have such a great impact? Why do some Christians have a seemingly deeper and broader influence for Christ? Certainly there is a part of that answer that can only be found in God's sovereign plan. But just as certainly it also has something to do with the nature and commitment of the particular church, or a particular ministry, or an individual Christian. And in that regard, what Paul writes here will be a great benefit to us as a church and as Christians, because Paul says there in verse one, that his coming to Thessalonica was not in vain. It wasn't a failure. It wasn't a waste of time. It wasn't a bunch of empty wasted time, it was not fruitless. It was not in vain. In fact, we saw in chapter one just how successful Paul's ministry in Thessalonica had been.

In fact, the gospel had a very powerful impact in that city. Lives had been dramatically changed. You see that in verses nine and 10 of chapter one. It says, "For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to

wait for His son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come." Lives had been dramatically transformed by the gospel, and the influence of these changed lives become far reaching. You see that in verses six through eight. It says, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything." This is a church full of people who had been radically transformed by the power of the gospel and this was a church that was having a huge impact. They were an exemplary church.

And the change was permanent. The change that had occurred in them was permanent. It was there even in the face of opposition. Paul knew that after he had left the church that they had been persecuted, so he sent Timothy to them to see how they were doing in light of the persecution that they were facing. Was the ministry really successful? Could it stand up to the pressure, the heat, the opposition? Or, had it just been superficial? Well, we're told in chapter three about this visit by Timothy. Chapter three verse five, he says, "For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain." So he's concerned that, were we really successful, was our ministry really fruitful? Was it carrying on? And verse six gives the answer. It says, "But now that Timothy has some to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love."

So the ministry in Thessalonica had been successful, very successful. But you might remember from the account in Act 17 that Paul's ministry there had been attacked. In fact, he had to flee from Thessalonica because of the attacks. And the attack on the ministry continues even after he left town. So Paul writes this section to address the attacks. And the attacks were personal as we're going to see as we go through this. When you don't like the message it's very common to attack the messenger, because if you can undermine the messenger in some way then you can undermine the message as well. And that's why Paul addresses the attacks. He wasn't so concerned about attacks against him personally, but in this case they had to be addressed because the gospel was at stake. The ministry of the gospel was at stake. And so there's a sense in which you and I can be thankful that these attacks came against the apostle Paul, because in addressing those attacks he gives insight into his own ministry, into his own heart, and into his own motives, and how he went about ministry. And, in reading what he says here, we'll see what are the ingredients of this successful ministry that he had there in Thessalonica.

This section could be a great help for you as an individual Christian and for us as a church as we think about doing ministry for the Lord. When I was a young man, when I was a young Christian, I heard a sermon on this passage that had a big impact on me and how I understood ministry. I can still remember the outline from that sermon. Can't remember what happened last week, but I can remember the outline from this sermon from decades ago. It shaped the way I understand ministry and the essentials in serving the Lord in whatever context I found myself. Whether it's at home as a husband and a dad, or whether it was in the work force as a banker or now as a pastor. These things, these principles that are found in this text, have shaped the way I understand what ministry is supposed to be all about.

So I'm looking forward to diving into this particular text. And, we're going to swim around in it for a while. We're going to get out of it all that we can and gain all the benefit that we get from what's written here. Now you can break the passage down and say that verses one through six focus primarily on the man, on the character of the man. And verses seven through 12 focus on the method, or the conduct of the man. But, under both of those general headings there are several sub-headings and there's an awful lot of overlap. So, we'll just go through and we'll identify principles and we'll see how far we get tonight and then we'll pick it up from there next time.

Let's begin by considering the qualities of a man who has a fruitful ministry. What's at the heart of a fruitful ministry? And the first thing I want you to take note of is integrity. Integrity. Verse one of chapter two, he says, "For you yourselves know." The 'for' there at the beginning connects with that was said in chapter one and there is something that Paul is going to repeat here in chapter two that he has mentioned in chapter one and he's going to super-emphasize it here in this section.

Back in chapter one verse five, at the very end of the verse, he says, "Just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." Just as you know. And did you notice as we read these 12 verses how many times Paul made a similar statement to that, just as you know. For example, in verse one it's "For you yourselves know." In verse two he says, "As you know." In verse five he says, "For we never came with flattering speech. as you know." In verse nine he says, "For you recall, brethren." In verse 10 he says, "You are witnesses." And in verse 11, again, he says, "Just as you know." That's important. All the times that he says that. Paul's character is being attacked by the opponents of the gospel. Paul is being slandered and accused of all kinds of wrong doing as we'll see as we go through the passage. In his defense Paul appeals to the memory of the Thessalonians. He urges them to recall what kind of man he was when he was there with them. Paul's refutation of the charges against him is, let the record stand for itself. He asks the Thessalonians if the evidence being brought against him really fits the charges. This is a masterly defense and it highlights the absolute necessity in any ministry that wants to be fruitful. There has to be integrity. You have to live a life that matches up to what you claim.

Paul's life was so consistent that he invited and welcomed open scrutiny. And Paul certainly wasn't reclusive. He didn't just show up, proclaim his message and then just disappear. No, in verse seven he says, "We lived among you." Paul lived and moved and even worked in the midst of the people. They had every opportunity to observe his life. And he invites them to evaluate whether he lived out what he preached or not. He's calling upon their memory. He says, you know me, I lived among you. You had every opportunity to observe my life. Was my life consistent with what I preached or wasn't it?

And if we're going to be effective and fruitful in ministry we have to have that kind of integrity. It's the opposite of hypocrisy. Where you claim one thing but you don't live like it. And that's rampant in our day. There are lots of people claiming to be Christians but they aren't having any impact for the gospel because they don't live a life consistent with it. And in fact in many cases they don't live like the gospel is important at all. That's not uncommon. It's spoken about in the Bible. In 2nd Timothy 3:5 it talks about people who hold to a form of godliness but they've denied the power of it. They claim it and they have the form of it. Maybe they go to church. They are involved in some activity but their lives deny it. In Titus chapter one verse 16, talking about some people he says, "They profess to know God, but by their

deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." So they make a profession but their life denies their profession. Hypocrisy makes you worthless for the cause of the gospel. And that's the most common charge brought against Christianity. Isn't it? The church is full of a bunch of hypocrites who say one thing and live like something else.

But people are impacted when they see the real deal. When they see the power and grace of God that's displayed through a life of integrity. This is what makes such a big impact in a home, or at a school, or at work where people have a chance to see the real you. It's the integrity of our lives that makes the difference in those kinds of contexts. So, in those contexts what do people see in you? Do they know you are a Christian? Do they see you living consistent with what you claim to believe?

Another common hindrance is legalism. Legalism blurs the truth of salvation by grace. Blurs the truth of the gospel. Legalism usually turns into judgmentalism. And that really blunts the impact of the gospel if all you're doing is judging people all the time. You're quick to point out the displays of your own depravity while denying the depravity in your own heart. That doesn't help the cause of the gospel. And legalism does not produce integrity. When we come up with a bunch of artificial rules that we pile on top of the gospel and then make those artificial rules the standard for ourselves and everybody else, guess what? Inevitably we wind up violating our own rules because there's no way for us to be consistent with them. It's not about rules. We can't keep rules. That was the issue with the Pharisees and that was something that Jesus continually hammered them on. The fact that they made up all of these rules and they themselves didn't keep them. In Luke 11:46 He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers." That's the idiocy of legalism. There are people now with all these burdens but nobody can keep them all. Legalism won't lead to a life of integrity. And integrity is needed if we're going to be fruitful for the gospel.

We'll see more of what that life of integrity looks like as we look at the other features mentioned here, the other principles of Paul's ministry and life. But let me add one other crucial element regarding integrity. Integrity isn't just about the kind of life we live in front of other people but it's also about the kind of life we live before God. Paul didn't just summon the Thessalonians to be witnesses to his integrity. He also summoned God. You see it in verse five, he says, "For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed- God is witness." And, in verse 10 he says, "You are witnesses and so was God." Paul says that God knows what kind of life he has lived. And it's not the kind of life he's being accused of by his opponents. This is the real test of integrity. What kind of person am I when nobody's around? What do I do when it's just me and the Lord?

Now, be sure you understand this. Paul is not claiming that he lived a perfect life. Paul referred to himself as a wretched man in Romans seven. Paul called himself the foremost of sinners in 1st Timothy chapter one. But a life of integrity is a life that is transparent before God. It involves being honest. It involves confessing my sin to God. A life that's consistent with our message is not a life that pretends to be perfect but a life that is humble, a life that is dependent on the Savior. It's a life marked by a clear conscience. I'm not trying to hide anything. When Paul was dealing with attacks against him in the church in Corinth he made a similar appeal. Second Corinthians chapter one verse 12 he said, "For our

proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conduced ourselves in the world, and especially toward you." Paul says I'm being accused of all kinds of things. My defense comes from my own conscience. I know what kind of life I've lived before God. God knows what kind of life I've lived before Him.

Paul's desire was to live a life with a clean, clear, conscience. In 2nd Timothy chapter one verse three, he says, "I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience." I'm serving God with a clear conscience. I'm calling God in to witness on my life. And this was his defense when he was hauled in and questioned in Jerusalem. In Acts 23 verse one it says, "Paul, looking intently at the Council," the Sanhedrin, the ruling body there in Jerusalem, "he said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." A perfectly clear conscience.

In chapter 24 verse 16 in another defense that he had to give, this one before Felix, he says, "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men." Now that's living a life of integrity. That's living a life that is open to examination. That is a life that is confessing sin. That was the goal of Paul's life, that was the goal of Paul's ministry. In 1st Timothy chapter one verse five he says, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience."

A good conscience. Is it any wonder when you think about things like that why God was able to use Paul in such a mighty way? He was a man of integrity. He lived a life of integrity, open to the scrutiny of man and of God. But it wasn't just Paul who lived that kind of life because there's something else to take note of here. A second mark of this man that had a fruitful ministry. It's not just integrity. There's a second mark there that's really interesting that you need to take note of and that unity.

Unity. Back in verse one of 1st Thessalonians two, he says, "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming." Our coming? Who's coming? Well back in chapter one verse one we're told that Paul and Silvanus and Timothy were together. Paul wasn't a one man dynamo. He didn't roll into Thessalonica all alone and lighted up all by himself. He had Silvanus, or also known as Silas, and Timothy with him. They're with him as he writes this letter. Paul's the author of the letter but they are there with him as he writes the letter. They were there with him when he was in Thessalonica. And this section here doesn't talk about Paul's ministry, it speaks about their ministry as they walked together as a team doing this ministry. And note how frequently Paul points this out. In verse two he says, "But after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition." Verse three, "For our exhortation." Verse four, "But just as we have approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts." Verse five, "For we never came with flattering speech." Verse six, "Nor did we seek glory for men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority." Verse seven, "But we proved to be gentle among you." Verse eight, "Having so fond an affection 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 very dear to us." Verse nine, "For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the

gospel of God." Verse 10, "You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers." And verse 11, "Just as you know how we were exhorting."

So all these positive characteristics that we are going to see listed here in this passage were just as true of Silas and Timothy as they were of Paul. And there will be some important things to take note of in light of that as we go through this passage. Teamwork is essential to fruitful ministry. The Lord isn't looking for lone ranger servants. He's putting together teams. When Jesus sent out His disciples to minister He sent them out in pairs, Mark 6:7. The apostles worked as a team. Paul always worked with teams of men. Every aspect of ministry should be approached on a team basis. A husband and wife ought to minister as a team to their children. Elders are to function as a team as they lead the church. And at every level of ministry within the church we should develop a team approach. All of our ministry should represent a united approach. And that can only happen as a church is united around a Biblical theology of ministry. They all understand why they are doing what they are doing. It's a Biblical theology of ministry. A ministry that has certain theological foundations that aren't negotiable. Things like a high view of God, a high view of scripture, the centrality of the local church, a true view of man and his real condition. And then building upon those foundations we apply the Biblical mandate to make disciples with the goal of presenting every man complete in Christ meaning that they are mature in their walk with Christ. They are mobilized, serving, using their gifts within the church, and they're multiplying, they too are making disciples. Paul and Silas and Timothy, that wasn't just theory, that was their practice. That is what they did. And that's why they were united and that's why the things that are mentioned here are true of all of them because they all knew what they were doing, they all knew why they were doing it, they were all about making disciples and they understood exactly what that meant.

Now, these men, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, they had different roles on the team. It was understood that Paul was the leader of the team. Nobody was going to question that. They understood too that they had different gifts. Paul was an apostle. Paul's writing inspired scripture. He's a gifted apostle. Silas was gifted as a prophet according to Acts 15:32. Timothy, we're not told specifically in what way he may have been gifted, maybe that he was gifted as a evangelist, because in 2nd Timothy 4:5 he's told to do the work of an evangelist. So they had different roles, they had different gifts, but they were united in serving together and they're all following the same pattern. They all know what direction we're going and why we're doing this. When you have individual who all understand Biblically what ministry is all about, those individual believers can then work together as a united team and truly serving together they will have fruitful, impactful ministry for the gospel.

So as you think about your own life, and as we think about our church and the impact we're having, we can start to evaluate ourselves. We can ask if we're really living lives of integrity. Through our lives we proclaim that the gospel is true and it has transformed my life. If not, what needs to change? And is there a unity, are we all on the same ministry page? Are my wife and I sharing the same theology of ministry as it relates to our parenting? Do the people I'm sharing a ministry with have a Biblical understanding of ministry? As a church, and particularly leaders in the church, do we have clearly defined and well understood theology of ministry? It's what really makes the difference. Every church has a statement of faith. Hardly has any church has a statement of their theology of ministry. But it's

that theology of ministry that's truly Biblical, where everybody understands it, everybody is united around it and working as a united team, that's the church, that's the ministry that has the impact.

If that's not the case what can we do to sharpen the focus? It's so easy just to get busy and to slip into kind of a maintenance mode without thinking clearly and Biblically about why we are doing what we are doing. Integrity and unity, they are absolutely critical for a successful ministry.

There's a third principle that we can pull out of there. This is found in verse two and it is intensity. "But after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition." These guys were intense. Paul, Silas, and Timothy, they were three intense guys. They were intense in their pursuit of ministry. They weren't going to allow anything to deter them from what they were called to do. You could throw all the physical abuse you wanted, all of the gross you wanted, all the outright opposition you wanted against them, they weren't going to stop. They were absolutely relentless in their pursuit of ministry. They acted like they had been commissioned by a great God and they had a great gospel to proclaim.

The intensity of their ministry matched the significance of their ministry. They believed that they had been commissioned by a great God to proclaim a great gospel. Look at what we're told here in verse two. They had suffered. They had suffered physically in Philippi. That's the last city that they were in before they came to Thessalonica. Let's look at that. It's back in Acts chapter 16. Acts chapter 16 starting, well we'll just start in verse 19. There had been a slave girl who was demon possessed who could, well she had a spirit of divination. She could tell the future. Her masters were making a lot of money off of her. Paul cast the demon out of her. Didn't make her masters very happy. So verse 19, "But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.' The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." That's physically suffering. Getting beaten with rods, hey, that's no light matter. And no doubt they were still feeling it and showing the signs of it when they came to Thessalonica. It's been said they probably staggered into town after the beating they had taken in Philippi. And the Thessalonians must have known about it because verse two says, "As you know." They probably could see what had happened to them. They had suffered physically.

And it also says that they were mistreated. First Thessalonians 2:2, they were mistreated. False charges were brought against them. They were stripped publicly. They were beaten without a trial. They were thrown into prison. Their feet were put in stocks. They were treated like they were notoriously dangerous criminals. And what made it even worse is that Paul and Silas, they happened to be Roman citizens. That's pointed out in Acts 16:37. They had been denied the due process promised to Roman citizens.

So, Philippi was their first European city to take the gospel to, and they had a rough time in Philippi to say the least. It had been rough. So what did they do? Did they regroup and say, you know we need to revise our strategy. Did they back off on the intensity and say, hey, we need to kind of fly under the radar a little bit. That's not at all what they did. They ministered with a God-given gospel-fueled intensity. A God-given, gospel-fueled intensity. It says here that they had boldness. They continued on without any fear and with complete confidence. That's what boldness means. No fear, complete confidence. Their speech wasn't hindered at all by any fears or any restraints. They were just going to keep doing what they had been doing. And that's just the way they did it. That's just the way they rolled. That's how they did their ministry. They didn't know any other way to do it.

Let me just read to you several examples from the book of Acts as it relates to this aspect of their ministry. Paul had been saved in Damascus and then he came down to Jerusalem. The believers in Jerusalem were a little skeptical to let Paul into the fellowship because the last time he had been in Jerusalem he had been killing Christians. So they had a pretty hard time believing his conversion was real. So Acts 9:27 says, "But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus." Right from the very beginning, brand new convert, Paul is speaking out boldly in the name of Jesus. "And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord." Right from the very beginning Paul's ministry was marked by a boldness.

In Acts 13 verse 46 it says, "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly." Without fear, with complete confidence, they spoke out. In chapter 14 verse three it says, "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord." Speaking boldly. This wasn't just Paul and Barnabas in Acts 18 it speaks this way of Apollos. It says he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. Chapter 19 verse eight again referring to Paul. "And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." And in chapter 26 verse 26 he says, "For the king knows," as Paul gives his defense here again, "the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence." There's that same idea. Speaking with confidence. Speaking with boldness. But please notice that this boldness wasn't something that they just cranked up on their own. It says in 1st Thessalonians that we had boldness in our God. Their boldness came from God. It came from a reliance in the Lord, as we saw in Acts. They lived in Him, they lived for Him, their confidence was in Him. They lived their lives under His control. They found their strength in him. Their boldness didn't come because they had a certain personality. It came because they had confidence in God.

In 2nd Corinthians 3:12 Paul said, "Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech." When you have a hope fixed in God and you know you are going to heaven no matter what happens today, why not speak out boldly? If you really believe it. Their confidence, their boldness came from God. Their boldness was drawn from their theology. Driven by their theology. Boldness springs from the conviction that God is our God. As it says here, "We had boldness in our God." Come from the conviction that the God of the universe, He's our God. And our God will help us. And they beseeched him for that help. In Ephesians chapter six, the end of the book there, verse 19 and 20 Paul asked the believer sin

Ephesus, “Pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” There he recognizes that proclaiming the gospel involves opening your mouth and speaking out boldly. But it’s something that we need from the Lord. This boldness comes from Him. Pray for it.

They had a supernaturally given intensity in their ministry. Their boldness came from God and so did their message because they had boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God. It’s not our message. It’s not our gospel. It comes from God. This is God’s message. God is the source of the good news of the gospel. And it can stand up to the fiercest opposition. He said we spoke the gospel of God amid much opposition. That’s an athletic term. It speaks of a struggle. It speaks of a battle. There was a conflict. There was a conflict when Paul was in Thessalonica. That’s what he’s referring to. If you’re still in Acts you might want to flip over to chapter 17. In verses five through nine he explains that opposition, that conflict. Here it says, “But the Jews, becoming jealous,” because this ministry of these three men is having such a huge impact in the city the Jews are becoming jealous “and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.’ They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.”

So, this is an ugly mob that gets formed there in Thessalonica. There’s accusations of treason brought against Paul and Silas and Timothy. They’re saying that there is another king. It’s treason. The opposition there was strenuous, persistent. That’s the way the opposition is always going to be. So the ministry has to be approached with a matching intensity. You hear Popovich talk about that all the time. When the Spurs lose he says the other team showed up more ready to play. They were more intense than we were. Our intensity didn’t match their intensity. Well, our opposition, what kind of intensity do you think they show up with? Satan’s like a roaring lion seeking to devour. Pretty intense. We better have a matching intensity if we’re going to have a fruitful ministry. Proclaiming the gospel is inevitably going to lead to conflict. There will always be the pressure to compromise or to just be quiet. Well, that’s not going to produce a fruitful ministry. Compromising, keeping quiet, you’re not going to get any fruit from that. Fruit in the midst of the inevitable conflict will only come from a God-given, gospel-fueled intensity. Where we believe we’ve been commissioned by a great God, and we have a great gospel.

We need to grow in our confidence in God, developing convictions that assure us that this God, He’s our God. And that this message, it’s His message. If we tend to keep quiet, just want to avoid conflict, well, we need to rethink our theology because that’s fearing man more than fearing God. Proverbs 28 verse one says, “The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” Our enemy is like a lion. We need to be like a lion; bold as a lion.

So what is at the heart of a ministry that is fruitful, a ministry that is impactful, a ministry that is far-reaching and permanent? Well, so far we’ve identified three: Integrity, unity, and intensity. And I just

want, in conclusion, to help you think about the connection between those three. Intensity is greatly affected by integrity and unity. It's affected by integrity because if I'm walking around feeling guilty because I know that God knows that I'm not living consistent with what I claim, if I'm walking around knowing that God knows that there is some sin I haven't confessed, how bold do you think I'm going to be? And unity relates to intensity because it is intense, it is hard. You want to feel like you're part of a team. If you don't feel like you're part of a team, if you feel like you're out there on your own, how bold are you going to be? I can remember as a brand-new Christian in college understanding right away that if you start telling people about Jesus, some might not be happy about that. It amazed me, but pretty soon I figured out that's how it works. So I went to a buddy of mine and said, I'll make you a deal. I'll be bold, you be bold, we'll stick together. So that is everybody else hates us, hey, it's you and me. Right buddy? That's how it works. You're a lot bolder when you know you are part of a team and you're all pulling together. The unity greatly affects the intensity.

May God help us to desire a faithful ministry, a fruitful ministry for His glory, and may He help us to see our part in that ministry. And may we examine our own lives in light of the example of these three men. You know Paul commended the Thessalonians because they followed the example of these three. Let's us follow our example too. Let's live lives of integrity and unity and intensity. May God help us to develop a stronger ministry. We'll come back and pick it up from here next week. Let's pray.