

Institute Highlight

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Institute Recap + Celebration

- The Citizens Institute exists to train and equip our church family in theology, doctrine, and spiritual practices to follow Jesus in everyday life.
 - 3 core modules – Formation, Scripture, Theology
- Just wrapped up Module I.
 - 18 people – 10 weeks on spiritual practices – prayer, Scripture, hospitality, fasting, and sabbath.
 - Monday – Beautiful time of sharing what the Lord did.
- It's our hope every member here at some point in their journey with us will step into this.
- **Module II: Scripture** is coming up in September – sign ups open May 1.

Introduction to Sermon

Alright, grab a Bible, hopefully you brought yours with you this week and go with me to **1 Thessalonians 2:1-16**.

As you're turning there, just to get us going, I want you to think about a time where your **expectations for something did not match reality**.

- You finally get to see a **movie** that everyone has been ranting and raving about for the past 3 weeks, and while it's good – it just doesn't quite live up to the hype of what you expected.
- Or maybe you had a particular idea of how your **weekend** was going to look – plans for relaxation and time with friends and some of your favorite activities, and then you get sick, or your boss drops a last minute project on you, or your friend bails.
- Or maybe you have expectations for a certain **relationship** in your life – how a spouse, or a friend, or a coworker will treat you – that they just don't quite live up to.

Now here's what I think those types of situations and scenarios prove to us – **Expectations matter**.

The expectations you have for a particular event, or how something is going to go, or even expectations on certain relationships – how someone will treat you and interact with you – those greatly affect your ability to enjoy and to receive that thing.

And I think one of the places that our expectations come up quite a bit is within the church, and specifically expectations in our relationship to our leaders within the church.

We all have expectations when it comes to who leads us within the church.

Consider for example this exaggerated quote from theologian Philip Ryken who writes – “[The perfect pastor] **condemns sins, but never upsets anyone. He studies from 8am until midnight and is also the janitor. He makes \$60 a week...and gives about \$50 a week to the poor. He is 28 years old and has been preaching for 30 years... The Perfect Pastor smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work... He spends all his time evangelizing the unchurched and is always in his office when needed.**”

Now, certainly that's exaggerated for effect, but even if our expectations are not that extreme, we certainly all have them. Expectations for pastors, for our Community Group Leaders, for our Serving Team leaders...

- Expectations of what those folks should or shouldn't do...
- Who they should or shouldn't be...
- Expectations for whether they should try to lead us at all...

So I think one of the things that would be helpful for us to get clear on if we're going to live how God has called us to as the Church, is our expectations for leaders. Because leadership in the church is Biblical. It's part of God's good design for how he established the church to run – with elders/pastors and deacons – various people filling roles of helping serve and lead within the church.

This is God's design...and it's good.

But it can so often create chaos and confusion when we aren't clear on what that means or how these relationships should be.

And so as we explore 1 Thessalonians 2 together, I think this text is going to help us answer 2 very simple questions:

What does a Godly leader look like and how can I be led well?

And my goal in this is sort of two-fold:

1. To help you if you are a leader here (CG leader, Sunday Team leader) – to know what it is that godly leaders do.
2. To help you who are being led (by pastors, by CG leaders) – to know what the Bible and God Himself expects of leaders and how you can respond in godly ways to that leadership.

Context to Passage

And I think this passage in 1 Thessalonians 2 is a great place to explore and talk about those expectations and what a godly leader actually does. Here's why, let me set up the context for us...

- Remember from last week, the apostle Paul is writing to a church he planted about a year or so earlier in the ancient city of Thessalonica.
- After being there for only a few months, he and his companions Silas and Timothy were forced to leave because of a riot happening in the city because of their preaching, and he hasn't been back since.
- And apparently one of the issues that has come up in his absence is that some folks in the city (most likely the jealous Jewish leaders we read about last week) have started to spread lies and accusations against Paul and his motives for planting this church in the first place.

You see at this time, around 50 AD, a common sight on a street corner in a city like Thessalonica were public speakers known as a **sophos** or a **cynic**. These were two different types of public speakers who would travel from town to town, stand on street corners, gather a crowd, and talk – about life, philosophy, a solar eclipse means the end of the world – you name it.

But a sophos or cynic had a lousy reputation.

- The stereotype was – they would show up in a city out of the blue, draw a crowd with their speeches and prey on people's hopes and fears – basically emotional manipulation to lure in the gullible and naive.
- And then after the crowd was hooked they would ask for money and hit on the women.
- And then when they're done they would expect a large round of applause and then to be invited by a wealthy citizen – hey come stay with me, I'll feed you, house you, etc.

So since Paul's absence some folks have gone to this church and accused Paul of being nothing more than a sophos or cynic. He came in for a little bit of time, preyed on your hopes and fears about the return of this Jesus guy, and all he was after was a free place to stay, your money and your women. **Stay away from him, he's not to be trusted.**

Paul has caught wind of these allegations, and in this part of the letter he lays out for them a defense on why the allegations are not true. Why he's not just some cynic or sophos – why his ministry while he was in Thessalonica was from the Lord and honoring to the Lord.

Paul's like – “look y'all, God is my witness. He tests my heart. He knows my ministry among you was good and honoring and holy and right.”

Godly Leaders

And so this portion of 1 Thessalonians is Paul's defense of his ministry, of his leadership. Talking about why it was good and right and godly. And in it, as he defends his ministry, we catch a vision for what a Godly leader looks like and does.

So hopefully you're there by now, let's work this passage together, and I want to highlight 4 things a godly leader does and then we'll circle back at the end to address what it means to respond to godly leadership in a godly way...

1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

1. Declare the Gospel boldly (v1-2)

Right before arriving in Thessalonica to plant this church, Paul was in Philippi planting a church and preaching the gospel there. And things were a bit rough for him. He says it here in v2 – “Shamefully treated”.

- You can read about this in Acts 16, but in Philippi Paul and his companion Silas were publicly beaten, thrown in jail, and then kicked out of the city for preaching the gospel.

But even though that's what they had just faced, immediately when they get to Thessalonica, they start preaching the gospel again. And Paul points to that and says – look you know my coming to you was not in vain. It was not some trick. I was not trying to take advantage of you. I had just suffered for preaching this gospel, but I was ready with boldness to declare it to you anyways.

This is what a godly leader does – they are unafraid and unapologetic about declaring the gospel.

- They don't shrink back because of the beliefs of the culture.
- They don't stop boldly declaring Christ because previously someone didn't like it or was rude in response.
- Godly leaders are consistently trying to point people back to Jesus. To make much of Jesus.
- They are eager – “I want those I lead to know Christ.”

I think about what Eric Peterson said about his dad Eugene at this funeral a handful of years ago. Eugene Peterson, if you're not familiar, was a well known pastor, most famous for his writing of the Message translation of Scripture. Wrote over 40 books, preached thousands of sermons.

And his son Eric at his funeral said - “My dad fooled everyone. They thought he had hundreds of different messages. That he was saying something new in every book or every sermon...but he really only had one – The pursuing love of God.”

A godly leader beats one drum. Over and over and over again – the pursuing love of God in Christ. The good news of salvation for sin and sinners.

3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. 5 For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed — God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

2. Serve for God's approval, not the approval of others (v3-6)

Paul addresses the rumors head on – I wasn't doing this for money, or to get you to like me, or for you to give me glory/praise – I did it to please God. To serve God.

Godly leaders serve to please God, not to please the people they lead.

This is a lesson I've been painfully learning firsthand over the past four years – **If as a leader, you live for people's approval you will die from people's rejections.**

There are over 105 adult members at Citizens Church. Not to mention about 25-30 more who are connected to our community. Not to mention the hundreds of others who have come through our doors for worship at some point in the past 3 years of our church.

- Do you know how many different opinions that means there are about the songs we sing, the sermons we preach, the way groups are structured, the ministries we offer or don't offer...
- Do you know how hard it is to please that many people with every single decision you make?
- You know how hard it is to please 2 people with every single decision you make?
- You know how hard it is for me to like the decisions that I make?
 - And I'm not even saying some of those opinions are invalid or wrong.
 - And this doesn't mean I don't care if you dislike the decisions we make – "Get over it, I'm serving Jesus!"
- **It's just that I have had to learn painfully, and will have to continue to learn, probably painfully, to lead from a place where I can sleep at night because I did my best to honor God.**
 - Living or dying by your approval of the decisions I have to make or the conversations I have to have as a pastor, will crush me.
 - I can't get too high off your praises and I can't get too low off your criticisms.

So what do I fall back on?

- We speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts...
- Or as Paul says it in **Gal 1:10 – 10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.**

Listen to me, leaders in the room – if you want to make everyone happy go sell ice cream, don't lead in the church. No one ever gets upset with chocolate chip ice cream (unless they are lactose intolerant, but you get the point). You will not please everyone you ever lead.

So you need an identity firmly rooted in Christ and a vision for leading for his glory.

You need, day by day, to be firmly established...

- In God's delight over you

- In God's speaking over you in Christ before you do any ministry at all – "you are my beloved child with whom I well pleased".

7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. 8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

3. Love gently with their whole selves (v7-8)

Paul says (Tim Olson translation) – we weren't bending over backwards to get you to like us, but we also weren't jerks.

What does he say? – ***We were gentle like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.***

Godly leaders are gentle.

What does it mean to be gentle?

- As my friend Ant says – **gentleness is using the least amount of force necessary.**
- J. Aaron Gruben – **"Gentleness is not being weak or fluffy. Gentleness is the power to control your strength, and to use it to protect and not harm."**
- Godly leaders are tender. compassionate. Kind.

There is a difference between authority and authoritarianism.

We don't shy away from the idea of authority in our lives. We believe authority is a good thing given by God.

Authoritarianism is not. Authoritarianism, or what the Bible would call being domineering – is when those in authority use their power dynamic in the relationship to dominate, subdue, or master those under his or her authority rather than lead, care for, and serve them.

Godly authority uses authority to serve. Authoritarianism uses authority to control.

And I know for some of you – that's your story. You hear the word "authority" or "leadership" in church, and it makes you sort of squirm or brings up this distaste or distrust, because you've seen authoritarianism...you've seen the worst versions.

And we could sit for hours and talk about how leaders within churches you have been a part of have used, or misused their authority for their own gain, to belittle you or others, to rule with an iron fist, to mistreat and abuse.

And I want you to hear me on this ... ***that is not okay. That is not of God.***

So we don't throw the authority baby out with the authoritarian bathwater...but by all means please throw out the bathwater. Godly leaders are gentle. Tender. Compassionate.

Why? Because they love the people they lead.

Puritan John Stott said so well – **"The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love...Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve."**

This is what Paul says in v8 – We were gentle...because you had become very dear to us. We shared with you not only the gospel, not only good news – we shared our own selves.

*Or I love the NIV's translation of this – **Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.***

Godly leaders love the people they lead. They **know** them and **are known** by them. They don't live in hiding or isolation. They share life with the people they lead – coming alongside them in the highs and lows of life.

But there's a tension here, last one, verse 9...

9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. 11 For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

4. Strive for holiness and challenge others to do the same (v11-12)

So notice this contrast – like a **mother** we were gentle. Not domineering. Not authoritarian. Tender and compassionate. We shared our whole selves, our whole lives with you...AND like a **father** – we strongly challenged you to walk in a manner worthy of God – aka to live like the Christian you claim to be.

It's a push and a pull. A carrot and a stick. Yes – gentle and affectionate like a mother. But also urgent and strong and direct and challenging like a father.

- I'm here for you, we're sharing life together...walking through the highs and lows.
- But also – I'm going after Jesus. I'm fighting sin. I'm being disciplined in spiritual practices. I'm repenting when I fail....
- **And I'm pushing you to do the same.**

In other words...

- Sometimes being a godly leader means coming alongside those you lead, hugging them, and weeping – gentle like a mother.
- Other times, being a godly leader means getting in someone's face and lovingly telling them to stop acting like a fool and start living for Jesus – challenging like a father.

Godly leaders do both.

And I think in our day and age today we really like the first one – empathy, kindness, softness, gentleness. Be my friend. I'm in on that. Offending someone is the cardinal sin of our day. The highest value of American society is niceness. Being nice.

So sometimes it can feel, as a leader, like you're doing something wrong if you strongly challenge someone to help push them towards Christ. Like what if they get offended, what if they get mad at me...

But let's heed Paul's example here – we ourselves ought to seek holy lives. So first, make sure you're following after Jesus yourself – pursuing him, repenting when you fail, turning from sin – and then like a father, charge those you lead to walk worthy of the kingdom of God.

Godly leaders...(RECAP)

- Declare the gospel boldly.
- Serve for God's approval, not the approval of others.
- Love gently with their whole selves.
- Strive for holiness and challenge others to do the same.

Again, it is my hope that all of us who lead here at Citizens, or aspire to lead here at Citizens, would step into this more and more. I would love for our church to be filled with more and more Godly pastors, deacons, directors, group leaders.

He has already gifted us with so many wonderful leaders – I think so highly of those who I get to serve and lead with in this church. I am praying for more. That would be a grace gift from God for us for our blessing and benefit.

Godly Members

But before we close, a few words on how we are to be led. Paul has a lot here for us to learn as we lead, but how are you to respond to leadership? What is the role of those *being led*?

Look at v13...

13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

There's a lot here – he talks about being imitators of other churches he planted across Judea. Suffering well at the hands of their own friends, neighbors, family members – just like these other churches and just like Jesus.

But here's what he commends them for more than anything else – **you received the word of God which is at work in you.**

In other words – here's what we strived to be as leaders among you – declaring the gospel, serving for God's approval, loving gently and challenging courageously – and here is, Paul says, what I celebrate about you and thank God for – **You were open to our leadership because you were open to the Word of God.**

So here's what it means to be led well – **to be open to God's work in your life through the leaders he has put in your life.**

So here's how it works when it all works as God designed...(because we often want to caveat with worst case examples, I'm saying when it functions biblically in line with Paul and the Thessalonians example in chapter 2...)

Godly leaders seek to declare the gospel boldly... and Godly members are open to that message.

- Eager to be reminded again and again of the good news of Christ. His life, death, and resurrection and how it makes us right with God through faith.
- I don't need more people who just affirm everything I already think or feel. I can get that with my curated tiktok algorithm – I need some folks who point me back to God's reality and what is actually true.

- I'm eager – when I show up to group, when I show up to church – tell me about Jesus. I need it. I need this good news. Help me drink from the well of GOD's riches and kindness to me in Christ!

Godly leaders strive to lead in a way that pleases God... and Godly members know that and trust that and support that.

- They aren't offended so easily when a leader makes a decision they would have done differently.
- "I didn't like the new group structure... I didn't like the potluck theme..."
- Sure, they are willing to give feedback, share concerns, but they're trusting – if this person loves Jesus they are seeking the leadership of the Holy Spirit and desiring to please God.

Godly leaders love gently with their whole selves... and Godly members are open to being known and loved by those who lead them.

- They don't keep their leaders at arms distance, or put on a face. They don't run or make the excuse – "well my leader is just busy..."
 - It makes me so sad when people say "I was going to call you about this, but I know you're busy with church stuff."
 - My response, you know this if you've ever said this to me is always "Yes. I am busy with church stuff – you're the church stuff. You are the stuff I'm busy with!"
- They let people into their mess to care for them and love them.

Godly leaders strive for holiness and challenge those they lead to live for God's kingdom... And Godly members are eager for these challenges.

- It's not – Well they didn't do it right....they could have used different words...it wasn't the right time for me...I just don't think that's right for me..
- Open to being challenged, encouraged, helped towards Christ.
- "Help me look like Jesus. Let's go after loving Him and being like Him together."

Conclusion

This is God's good design.

I said this at the start – our world is anti-authority. God is not. God is for his design of good godly authority, good godly leadership.

And so our ability to live into this, step into this – godly leading, godly being led – it's going to come down to – do we trust God? Do we trust his design for flourishing?

He is trustworthy. He is good. He is kind.

If we step into this, Citizens – imagine how beautiful this thing could be. This is God's Word, this is His design. It leads to flourishing. Let's seek that together by the power of Christ who died and rose again. He is worth it.

Pray.