

Study 2: Gentle Witness

Introduction

Have you ever had a mentor or close friend help you through a difficult, emotional issue, so much so that afterwards you felt the issue would not have been resolved as well without their assistance? What about their manner, motives, or methods assisted you in that difficult time? Chances are that they connected with you on a deep level that enabled you to see the problem from a different perspective or gain a level of clarity that would not have been possible otherwise.

Today's study focuses on Paul's example of being a gentle witness to early Christian converts. Rather than approaching his ministry as an academic exercise, Paul approached it with earnest effort and treating the converts like they were family, which enabled him to come alongside the converts without being a burden on them or creating mistrust. Through this example, Paul emulated Jesus' ministry. Paul describes his approach in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 because at the time Judaizers claimed he was trying to achieve personal gain through his ministry. By describing his approach in this chapter, we can better understand an ideal approach for telling others about the Gospel and spreading the good Word in an effective and un-manipulative way.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6

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. 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.

Discussion

1. Despite being persecuted and suffering, Paul persevered in his ministry work. The reference to Philippi refers to events in Acts 16:19-39. In these verses, Paul was imprisoned and endured much suffering, yet was able to give praise to God through song and God ultimately freed him and converted his captors. Ministering to others in the name of Jesus is not an easy road, yet Paul showed boldness, perseverance, and earnest effort despite feeling persecuted and enduring pain. **What are some priorities Paul lays out here and in Acts 16 if we intend to effectively minister to others under possible persecution or suffering?**

-Our priorities should be on pleasing God and doing his will, rather than pleasing man

-Through a genuine love of God and a desire to be a vessel for God we can avoid having our ministry be hijacked by selfish desires or superficial concerns or worries (such as how many people might show up to a Life Group meeting)
-When conflicts or disagreements arise, if our motives are pure we can best minister to people and identify resolutions that promote God's kingdom
-If our motives are pure, we become a reflection of our risen Lord, which becomes a powerful witness and role model to others

2. In verses 3-5 Paul asserts that the appeal of his ministry did not derive from error, impurity, deception, greed, to please man, or through flattering words. **What do you think this kind of ministry looks like in practice? Have you ministered to others in this way or been ministered in this way? Please share what it looked like?**

3. Paul and his team never ministered for personal gain or selfish desires. They sought to be real, authentic, and they focused on their relationship with God. **In what ways can we ensure our motives are pure and authentic when we engage in ministry?**

-Here are some suggested responses, although there may be many others:

-Study God's word and remember key verses that remind us that all authority derives from him

-Pray before we minister and ask for him to guide our ministry and motives

-Perform self reflection and carefully consider what our motivations are; if they do not derive from a genuine desire to deepen our relationship with God and do His work, then we should acknowledge that our effort will not likely achieve desired results until our motives are focused on God, rather than ourselves

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

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.

Discussion

4. At any time and in any culture, a nursing mother is recognized as an example of self-sacrifice, unconditional love, and nurturing care. A nursing mother and a newborn

infant develop a strong emotional connection of love. This is the lesson Paul has for Christ's followers engaging in spreading the gospel: do it with an emotional connection of love and with tenderness. **With this guidance in mind, how do you think we should discern whether someone is ready to hear the Gospel or not? How should we approach someone who might be reluctant to hear the Gospel?**

- It is important to ask good questions and to listen

- Practice discernment to gauge the extent to which someone might be open to the Gospel.

- Sometimes people might be approachable and ask probing questions, making it easy to discern their interest, but often it will not be that easy and it is important to ask questions and listen before witnessing to others

- If someone is reluctant to hear the Gospel, we should practice care to not be a burden; be an example of God's love, but approach it with gentleness, tenderness, and discernment

- Recognize that it is not us who bring someone to God, but rather God working through us, so it is important as Paul lays out throughout this passage to discern our motives and put our focus on God and his will

5. Paul's example is one without guile, showing love and being selfless towards converts. Being a witness to a new convert carries a great deal of responsibility since the example set by the witness might be the first and lasting impression that the convert has of Christ's love and mercy. **What are some practical ways a gentle and humble witness could approach a new convert with the care and compassion that a mother approaches an infant?**

- Walk along side the convert by understanding where they are and what they are struggling with in their discernment of the Gospel

- We must be genuinely interested and engaged in the experiences and conversations with the convert; this is something that cannot be faked nor should be faked; show genuine affection and interest like a good friend to the convert and their story

- Put your trust in the Lord and God's Word to help provide answers to questions that arise

- If you do not know the answer to a question, that is OK and it is OK to say you don't know; It's probably better to refer the convert to someone who might have Biblical answers to difficult questions, rather than trying to address the question yourself

- Testimonies and stories can be powerful; in the next question, we will explore the importance of sharing your story with the convert

- Recognize that ultimately God is in control; it is helpful to be confident and demonstrate an understanding of the Gospel, but overconfidence and self-interest could adversely impact a convert's direction; so it is always important to discern your motives and ask for God to guide your words and your relationship with gentleness and compassion

6. In verse 8, Paul states that because the new converts had become very dear to him he wanted to share not only the Gospel, but also our own selves. **Do you think it is important to share your own story with a new convert? Why or why not?**
- Testimonies can be powerful and useful, especially if you have a story or experience that might help a convert with a key question or concern
 - It is important to be vulnerable with a new convert; it is a way to build trust; how could you expect the convert to trust you if you are not willing to share your experience, the things that excite you about God, or your fears, concerns, or doubts?
 - We are often willing to give the Word or our opinions on the Word, but if we give of ourselves, we demonstrate that the Gospel is living and alive rather than simply an academic exercise
 - Recall that the Gospel is a message about the giving of God's Son and His giving of His own life for us (1 John 4); so it is difficult to make the Gospel come alive if we are unwilling to be vulnerable and share our own living experience with God, the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel
 - However, it is usually easier to talk about ourselves than it is to carefully and gently listen to someone who is new to the faith; we need to discern carefully whether telling our story will help to bring someone closer to God or if we are scratching our own ego by sharing our story; if it is the latter, then it might be better to share something short or ask good questions to better understand where the convert is and what he/she is thinking/feeling
 - Listen carefully to their questions or personal stories; empathize with them and if you have an experience in your testimony that might help them, discern if you think God would welcome your sharing of that story, and if the story can help draw the convert closer to God; if so, then share your story

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

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.

Discussion

7. Whereas verses 7-8 emphasize Paul's witnessing like a self-sacrificing mother, in verses 9-12 Paul equates his missionary work with the efforts of a loving, caring father to his children. A father is also another example of self-sacrifice, love, and care, but in a

different way than a mother. **What are some practical ways that ministering and spreading the gospel is similar to a father's love?**

-A loving father often works hard to provide for his family; he feels he has a responsibility to his family to provide for them; similarly a gentle, loving witness seeks to provide the Gospel to those wanting to hear it and/or wanting to see it alive in action

-A loving father inspires and motivates his children while also providing wisdom and guidance; similarly an effective witness can excite new converts while providing necessary guidelines and boundaries based on Biblical teachings to effectively teach the Gospel

-A loving father shows genuine affection and desires to be with his children; he desires to listen to his children and help them when they are in trouble; similarly an effective witness desires to be with others, to reflect God's sacrificial love to them, and to assist them with their questions

-A loving father is not a burden on his children; he is an encouraging comforter to his children; similarly an effective witness is easy and gentle on converts

8. Each verse in 9-12 emphasizes certain positive attributes of Paul's team. **What were some of these attributes?**

-Verse 9-the hard work and effort they put into the ministry

-Verse 9-their desire to not be a burden to anyone

-Verse 10-their pure character and motives

-Verse 10-God is their witness in their effort to be righteous and blameless in their conduct

-Verse 12-their words

-Verse 12-their goals and desires for the converts to walk in a manner worthy of God

Connection to the Gospel

There are many lessons to be learned from 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Two key lessons stand out that are worth emphasizing: 1) An effective witness avoids worldly techniques to spread the Gospel and 2) an effective witness treats his converts like they are family.

9. **What are some ways that Jesus' ministry in the Gospels was both countercultural (outworldly) and familial in nature?**

In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Paul uses the example of his ministry to demonstrate effective means to spread the Gospel to others. But most importantly, Paul's example emulates Jesus' ministry in both connecting with Jews and Gentiles seeking the Truth and in the family relationships he established with his closest followers, namely the disciples. Jesus genuinely loved His followers and inspired them to spread the Gospel throughout the world. We are called to do the same by working hard, being gentle, and showing genuine love and affection for those we are reaching out to. Our ministry should emulate and reflect both Paul's and Jesus' examples.

Closing/application

Paul is teaching his followers in these passages how to guide new believers into becoming lifelong followers of Christ. To do this, we need to apply effort and we need to approach the task like a selfless mother or father would approach their family. An understanding of God's Word and our own faithfulness to God are the only prerequisites necessary to take on this calling. Without faithfulness the sheep will be prone to stray and the roots will not be deep. With only a shallow understanding of God's Word, the sheep might be prone to misinterpret the lessons God has for their life. Paul's example of self-sacrificial ministry is an inspiring testimony to our own ministry.

References:

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