

TRANSFORMED LIVES

Jeremiah the prophet asked, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23). This may sound cynical, but it’s true. People may learn how to rearrange their behavior and become more socially acceptable, but only God can transform the human heart and enable real change for the better.

In this excerpt from the book *Waiting For The Second Coming*, well-known pastor and author Ray Stedman draws our attention to what it takes for lives not only to be rearranged but transformed. It is our prayer that these principles from 1 Thessalonians 1–2 will encourage you as you share the transforming power of God’s good news with others.

Martin R. De Haan II

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TRANSFORMED LIVES

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

The Thessalonian letters of the apostle Paul were written to a young church struggling to survive in an extremely dangerous world. Within 20 years of their writing, the whole of the ancient East was convulsed in warfare and rebellion. In AD 70, the armies of Titus surrounded the city of Jerusalem. Following a bloody siege, the city was overrun, the temple was destroyed, and the Jews were taken captive. The movements that culminated in these events had already begun when this first letter was written. Thus it is clear that the Thessalonian Christians were facing perilous times.

We too are living in dangerous times. Many years ago, E. M. Blaiklock, who was then Professor of

Classics at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, said something that I have never forgotten. This renowned biblical historian declared, “Of all the centuries, the 20th is most like the first.” We can, therefore, feel very close to this young church in Thessalonica.

Many today sense an approaching world crisis. A nervous, jittery stock market; a growing sense of cynicism and distrust of the political process; an increase in drug and alcohol dependency, with the resultant physical and mental toll in human lives; scientists tinkering with our genetic makeup and actually developing a business of selling fetal tissues—all these portend a frightening crisis looming on the horizon of our times. Add to this the now familiar threat of AIDS, the spread of famine in many

countries, and, of course, the ever-present threat of nuclear warfare, and it is clear that something terrible is about to happen. We are living in a world in chaos.

In 1980, leaders from all over the Western world attended the First Global Conference On The Future, held in Ontario, Canada. The chairman of that conference spoke these sobering words: “The bad news is that the end of the world is coming. The good news is, not yet. But the decade of the 1980s is going to be the most important in human history. If we don’t make the right decisions, the odds of our going beyond this decade are very slim. The danger of war and the collapse of Western civilization is a very real possibility.”

Even earlier, in 1972, a group of international industrial leaders and thinkers, called the Club

of Rome, suggested six proposals that humanity must put into effect if we are to survive on this planet. I will share only the first, which is a very significant proposal:

The survival of this planet necessitates new forms of thinking that will lead to a fundamental revision of human behavior and, by implication, of the entire fabric of present-day society.

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That simply says that if we cannot discover how to change people, there is no hope for saving the world

from ultimate collapse. In the immortal words of Pogo, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” There is no way out unless society can find a means of fundamentally changing human beings.

Right here is the glory of our message, for the gospel changes men and women. Paul’s letters to the young church at Thessalonica were written because the people there had found, in the good news about Jesus, a way to be changed. The focus and purpose of their lives had obviously been drastically altered.

Paul himself founded this church in Salonica (as it is now called). Today it is a bustling center of northern Greece, one of the few New Testament cities that is still flourishing. The ancient gate through which the apostle entered the city spanned the Egnatian Way, the Roman road that ran

from the Adriatic Sea to the Bosphorus. After Paul and his friends had been treated shamefully in Philippi, they journeyed on about 100 miles west to Thessalonica. Paul remained there at least 3 weeks, probably longer, but he was able to minister in the synagogue for only 3 sabbaths.

The Jews of the city became so enraged by his teaching about Jesus that they created a riot and captured Paul’s host, Jason, holding him responsible for the apostle’s behavior. Paul left the city, traveling south to Berea, and there began to preach again. The Jews from Thessalonica, however, followed him, causing another uprising in Berea. Finally, Paul was sent on alone to Athens. He remained there but a short time, and then moved to Corinth. It was from that city, in the year AD 50 or 51, that he addressed this

letter to the Thessalonian believers, only a few months old in Christ.

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In the salutation, Paul gave a double address for the church: one geographical and the other spiritual. The new believers lived in Thessalonica, but they were also found “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). Of the two addresses, the latter is the more important. If we have come to Christ, we

must see ourselves as primarily new creatures “in God the Father” and in “the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul was continually thankful in prayer for three things these believers possessed: their faith, their love, and their hope. In the New Testament, these are always listed as fundamental characteristics of those who have come to Christ. At the close of that wonderful 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul said:

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love (13:13).

In reading Paul’s letters, I never tire of noting how his mind worked. He had a marvelous ability to summarize many points in a single verse and then amplify them in easy-to-follow steps. As we see in the early verses of 1 Thessalonians, Paul was not speaking of mere faith,

hope, and love. He was very careful to be specific—a faith *that works*, a love *that labors*, and a hope *that endures*—the great motives of the Christian life. If you have true faith, if you have love born of the Spirit, and if you have hope in the coming of Christ, you will be motivated to live as you ought today.

THE WORK OF FAITH (1:3-5,9)

What is the “work of faith” that Paul mentioned in verse 3? He summed it up himself in verse 9. There he recognized that the Thessalonians had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” That is faith at work. Faith is not merely belief; faith works. It has the power to change. Faith enables us to turn from what is wrong to what is right, from dark and hurtful things to bright and helpful things, from the

worship of idols to the worship of God.

Notice the direction of this action: *to* God, *from* idols, not the other way around. You do not leave your idols for some reason and then painfully try to find God. What happens is that you discover something of the beauty, the glory, and the greatness of God; and, seeing that and wanting it, you are willing to forsake the cheap and tawdry things you once believed could satisfy.

Modern America is surely one of the most idolatrous countries the world has ever seen. We are surrounded with idol worship. I once heard of a Chinese man who visited here and was asked upon his return to China whether Americans worshiped idols. “Yes, they do,” he reported. “They have three of them. In the winter they worship a fat man in a red suit. In the

spring they worship a rabbit. And in the fall they sacrifice a turkey!” Although there may be a shade of truth to this clever line, these are not true idols. For the most part, they are myths and legends we pass along to each generation.

Television might be labeled an idol. Too many people spend far too long glued to a staring eye that feeds all types of ideas and emotions into their minds. But I don't think television is really an idol. Rather, it is an altar on which we spread offerings and sacrifices to the great god of self. Television panders to our lust for leisure and entertainment. It lures us to think always of our own comfort, our pleasure, our fear of boredom, our desire to be either thrilled or terrified by watching some spectacle or event. It encourages us to focus

on ourselves. But self is the true idol.

The Habits Of The Heart, a book written by a group of contemporary psychologists, develops the thesis that television causes Americans to forget how to serve. Perhaps this is not

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nearly as evident in Christian circles as it is in the world at large, but we face it also in the body of Christ. Jesus said that He came to serve, not to be served (Mk. 10:45). This is

the source of true richness and fulfillment. When we demand to be served, when we must always have something titillating our senses, the end is loneliness, emptiness, and ultimately despair. The proof is visible everywhere today.

America obviously worships not only Eros, the goddess of sex, but Baal, the erotic deity associated with fertility rites. Baal worship in the ancient world promoted degenerate practices of the most licentious kind and is behind many of the loathsome practices in our country today. Baal worship is manifested in the rise of homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. It is behind the pornography that pervades almost every aspect of modern life.

More than that, Americans are worshipping Molech, the terrible furnace

god into whose fiery mouth parents in ancient times threw their children, destroying them to relieve the guilt of their own consciences. The evidence for it today is rampant in the skyrocketing cases of child abuse and child molestation, not to mention the abortion murder mills.

Paul told us how to turn from these degradations. He addressed the Thessalonians as loved by God (v.4). The answer to idolatry begins with an acceptance of God's love. Everything starts there. Although the world at large perceives God as perpetually angry, looking on His creatures as a defiant, rebellious lot who refuse to have anything to do with Him, who ignore His teachers and suppress His Word, God does not look at our lost race that way. The truth is found in John 3:16, "For God so

loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” He sees us as victims, deluded and deceived.

Alluring philosophies have throttled our love and captivated and gripped our minds. Almost in total ignorance we pursue the

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things that destroy us. Most of us have already seriously messed up our lives. But then we learn the incredible truth that despite our failures God loves us, and that He gave His only begotten Son for us. It is in the cross that we see the love of God on exhibit. Paul so stated in Romans 5:8,
God demonstrates His

own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It is also in the Scriptures that we learn that He has chosen us (Eph. 1:4). How do you know, that out of the millions who have lived on earth, He chose you? The answer is, you began to be drawn toward God, to sense a desire for Him. The calling of God by means of the Spirit awakens a hunger within.

If you are longing to be different, if you want to be more than you are now, if you have tried to change and cannot, if you find the words of the gospel, the songs and hymns of Christians attractive, you are being drawn by the Spirit! Jesus said:

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him (Jn. 6:44).

When the good news came to Thessalonica,

people began to feel inside themselves a desire to have this Jesus who could make such a tremendous change in their lives. They responded to love and thus revealed that they were the elect of God.

Paul went on to detail the steps necessary to God's call. First, the gospel came to the Thessalonians "in word" (v.5). The Scriptures were preached, the truth was declared. The apostle spoke to them about the promises of God in the Old Testament. Acts 17 contains a record of Paul's preaching in the city of Berea. He believed the Bereans to be more noble, more open than those in Thessalonica in that they "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (17:11). It is through the Word of God—through the declaration of these great

promises and the simple narrative of the story of Jesus—that men and women are awakened and moved toward God.

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The second factor in God's call is His power. "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power" (v.5). The Word becomes real, compelling, gripping. The gospel has the ability to compel because it is no mere legend or myth.

Christmas is much more than a beautiful story that enchants people and helps them forget the ugliness of the present. It speaks of real events. Jesus was

indeed born in Bethlehem. The shepherds did come to worship Him. The angels sang their great promise of hope. A flaming star lit the heavens with glory. All of this actually happened. Jesus did live. He did move among men. He died a felon's death on a cross. He was raised from the dead. When the Thessalonians believed, they sensed the historicity and the power of these events and were changed. They became different people.

Also, said Paul, the gospel came "in the Holy Spirit" (v.5). Behind the power is the reality of God Himself. His Spirit can touch and fill the human spirit. He begins to minister to our minds and our hearts from within, opening them to understand these events.

Finally, the gospel came "with deep conviction" (v.5 NIV), moving the wills of the Thessalonians. They

acted, they did something about it—they yielded their lives to God.

Maybe you have been attending church for years and have heard the gospel many times, but you have never opened your heart to God. That is the final, necessary step. Ultimately, your will must be moved. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door [of the heart] and knock. If anyone hears My voice [feels desire] and opens the door [invites Him to come in], I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). That is what happened in Thessalonica.

This, then, is the "work of faith." Until you have actually received Christ, you have not exercised faith. You can believe the story to be true, but until it moves you to accept the Lord, to invite Him into your heart, you have not exercised faith.

THE LABOR OF LOVE (1:6-8)

A Changed

Attitude. The first sign that love is at work is a changed attitude. Instead of wearisome complaining about their afflictions, the Thessalonians found “joy of the Holy Spirit” (v.6). Not that there wasn’t good reason to complain! These young believers were ostracized at their work, hounded out of their homes, arrested, and put in prison because of their newfound faith. But, said Paul, they had learned to see these afflictions in a new way. They saw them as privileges, given to them for Jesus’ sake. The result was joy! They responded to God’s love by loving Him in return and welcoming the opportunities to suffer for His name’s sake.

Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God. But

there is always something that must come before that, something that many people do not seem to understand. God asks us to love Him because He first loved us. When trials, pressures, and hardships come along, we are able to see for ourselves what kind of solution only God can work out. The Thessalonians had stopped complaining and started rejoicing because they saw God working through their trials. If only we too could understand that afflictions are opportunities for God to demonstrate His sustaining grace and show His work in our lives today, we could experience the same joy they knew.

Sharing. The second mark of love’s labor is sharing. The Thessalonian believers shared the good news throughout Macedonia and Achaia (v.7). They did not do it by

means of great crusades or campaigns. There were no citywide meetings in rented stadiums. We can do that today, and thank God for it,

Afflictions are opportunities for God to demonstrate His sustaining grace and show His work in our lives.

but that is not what the Thessalonians did. They simply told their neighbors and friends what God had done for them. They explained the new joy and peace that had come into their hearts. Then, when their friends began to ask questions, they invited them over and opened the Scriptures. Through the

quiet, almost invisible network of what we would call home Bible studies, they shared the good news.

Silently, without fanfare, the gospel spread throughout this whole area of the Roman Empire. The entire countryside was stirred by what was taking place in people's lives. In Thessalonica, the city fathers described Paul and his friends by saying, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6). In this way the good news eventually filtered into all parts of the known world.

Daily Trust. The third proof of love's labor was displayed by the Thessalonian believers in their daily trust in God's care. "Your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it," Paul commended them (v.8 NIV). They believed that God was

their Father and would take care of them no matter what happened.

I once received a letter from two missionaries in Guatemala, Ron and Gretchen Bruno. Gretchen wrote of an incident that had encouraged her greatly. A poor widow in one of the congregations in Guatemala was without food and down to her last 20 cents. She began to pray about her problem. As she was praying, she felt a deep conviction that God was telling her to go to the large supermarket in town the next day and fill up several carts with groceries and take them to checkout stand number 7. This was not just a vague feeling on her part but a deep, Spirit-born conviction.

She went to the supermarket the next morning, loaded enough groceries into carts to last 2 or 3 months, and took

them to checkout stand 7. Just as she got there, the cashier closed the stand to go out for lunch. She suggested that the woman take her groceries to another stand, but the woman said, "No, I cannot. My Father told me to take these through stand 7." So she waited while the clerk went to lunch and came back again. The clerk was surprised to see the woman still there, but started to check out her groceries. Just then an announcement came over the loudspeaker, "Since this is our seventh year of business, we are pleased to announce that whoever is checking out at checkout stand 7 will receive free groceries."

Now, I am not telling you to go down to your local supermarket and stand in checkout lane 7, but I am telling you to do what this woman did, and that is to trust God. Believe

that He cares for you, that He is a loving heavenly Father, and that He has a thousand and one ways of meeting your needs.

Although God doesn't work the same way in each of our lives, the unchangeable fact is that He loves us. We belong to Him. The Thessalonians demonstrated this belief so effectively that their faith had been reported everywhere. These people had an invisible means of support, a resource that others knew nothing about, but the fact of it was evident in their confident behavior.

THE ENDURANCE OF HOPE (1:10)

A striking feature about the Thessalonian letters is that each chapter in both letters ends with a reference to the coming of the Lord. To these early believers the great hope lay in His

coming again. They believed what the angels had said to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner

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as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). It was the ever-present hope of the early church, and that hope became the dominant theme of the Thessalonian letters.

Their answer to the threat of personal death was a firm belief in Jesus' resurrection. Jesus had

said, “Because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19). Now they were to “wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Th. 1:10).

The Thessalonians were confident of their victory over death, and they did not fear what Paul called “the wrath to come” (v.10). This is not a reference to hell. In John 5:24, Jesus had said, “He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me *has* everlasting life, and *shall not come into judgment*, but has passed from death into life.” These faithful believers had learned from Paul that they would not face *that* judgment. Here, he was referring to a coming period of wrath on earth from which they could also be assured of deliverance by their Lord.

In the Old Testament, this period is called “the great and awesome day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31). It

is a time when God’s judgments will rain down on the earth. Jesus Himself described it as the “great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Mt.

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24:21). That time is yet ahead. But throughout these letters we learn that God has a plan to deliver His own from “the wrath to come.” Christians will have

victory, even over the approaching crisis of the world.

More than the certainty of heaven or escape from the agony of living is the promise that He who is coming again even now rules in the affairs of men. Intertwined with the promise of John 14 is the assurance that He will come to live within us. Jesus said, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (v.18). The wonderful paradox for Christians is that though the kingdom of Christ is still to come when Jesus will return to this earth, He is already here with us now. He is leading us, fulfilling us, ministering to us, guarding us, and, even now, ruling in earthly affairs.

What does this mean to us today? Simply this: Christians have no business being discouraged, defeated, or despairing.

If we succumb to any of these moods, it is because we have forgotten the great truths proclaimed in Paul’s letter. But there in troubled Thessalonica these truths were living, vital, and fragrant in the hearts of the believers. Surely, in our dark hour of history, God is calling us back to the fundamentals of the Christian life— faith, hope, and love.

TRANSFORMED LEADERSHIP

I Thessalonians 2:1-12

A new phenomenon in America is the rise of the mega-church, where a congregation of 2,000 to 3,000 members is regarded as a moderate-sized body. When I was a boy, a church of that size was considered enormous. Today, however, there are dozens of them. It is not uncommon to hear of a church with a congregation of 10,000 or more meeting every Sunday. In one such church, 3,500 people come together on Wednesday evenings, many of them unsaved. It is exciting to see the Lord at work in their midst.

I attended a conference a few years ago where 30 Southern California pastors met together. Among those attending were both young and old men, both outgoing

and retiring personalities. But their common bond was their deep concern for people. These men were pastors and shepherds. Guest speaker Peter Drucker, an expert on business and management, offered some comments on approaches and organization, but the main emphasis of all the discussions was how to minister to people.

In the first 12 verses of 1 Thessalonians 2, we find a great model for ministry. The apostle Paul was a master shepherd and, while there is no doubt that Paul was here defending himself from some criticisms that had arisen after his departure from Thessalonica, there emerges in this passage a marvelous picture of the work of an effective leader.

You may be asking, “How does this apply to me? Pastors are a special

breed. Does Paul have anything to say to me?" One of the young men at the pastors' meeting commented, "Jesus was so human that nobody would believe He was God, but we

Every believer is in the ministry and must learn how to touch and change people—how to shepherd them.

pastors are so godlike that nobody thinks we're human!" There is an element of truth in that. But may I remind you that every believer is in the ministry. If you are a parent, you have a little flock at home. This passage will help you lead them effectively. You may meet with friends at breakfast or lunch, or you may hold a

Bible class in your home. This passage teaches how to be effective in any ministry, how to touch and change people, how to shepherd them and be involved in the details of their lives.

According to verse 1, Paul's work among the Thessalonians had been effective, "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain." Why was he effective? Chapter 2 reveals three marks of transformed leadership: courage (vv.1-6), a loving spirit (vv.7-9), and faithfulness (vv.10-12).

THE FIRST MARK OF TRANSFORMED LEADERSHIP: COURAGE (2:1-6)

The first six verses reflect one of the primary qualities of transformed leadership—*courage!* Courage is the first essential for helping other people, especially when

they don't want to be helped! Do you sometimes find it hard to bring up a painful subject that needs to be discussed? Some people are very sensitive and do not like to be reminded of shortcomings and weaknesses. That is when courage is required.

Paul, of course, was referring here to physical courage. He really was understating the case when he said he was "spitefully treated," and that he had "suffered" in Philippi (2:2). Read Acts 16:16-40. This was one of the three times he was beaten with thick rods and then thrown into prison, a Roman form of punishment (2 Cor. 11:25). There, though he and Silas were thrust into stocks and held immobile, they began to sing praises to God.

Furthermore, Paul had suffered insult and mockery by being stripped of his clothes in public by

order of the magistrates in Philippi. His Roman citizenship had been ignored. Even when he was freed by an earthquake, he was summarily ordered out of town by the authorities. Yet he went bravely on to Thessalonica knowing that the same thing could happen there.

When a riot broke out in Ephesus, he actually tried to face down a howling mob who were bent on taking his life. He had to be restrained by his friends to keep from sacrificing himself to the mob's fury (Acts 19:21-41). One cannot read the life of Paul and fail to see the tremendous courage he demonstrated in his ministry.

Where did he get such courage? Some say that Paul was bold by nature, that he would take on anything or anyone. But certain verses indicate that

this was not true. When he came into Corinth and began to preach, he did so “in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). The Corinthians intimidated him.

If you want to reach out to your fellow workers, you may feel intimidated at times by the pagan atmosphere of your workplace. Paul felt that way too. He wrote:

When we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears (2 Cor. 7:5).

No, Paul was not naturally courageous. He was like most of us. The few times in my life that I have shown courage were simply the grace of God at work.

In the first few verses of 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul declared very clearly, both negatively and positively,

what was behind his courage.

First, according to verse 3, Paul did not preach out of “deceit” (“error” NIV). In other words, he did not come preaching some private revelation. Today we are confronted with a parade of gurus, prophets, seers, avatars, and others, peddling their peculiar forms of doctrine. The Hare Krishnas confront us in

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airports. The Moonies, under the leadership of Sun Myung Moon, who claims to be the Messiah, boldly proclaim their doctrine across the country and

around the world. On the surface they appear to be bold and courageous. They seem to be driven by conviction—and perhaps they are to some degree—but it is wrong conviction. Paul's message was the truth of God, confirmed by the prophets and by Jesus Christ Himself.

Second, Paul did not preach a gospel that invited people to participate in impure practices ("uncleanness" [v.3]). Some, like Jim Jones, attract great crowds of followers by encouraging them to indulge themselves, to throw over all moral restraints and do whatever they wish. The Bhagwan commune in Oregon engaged in sexual orgies and people flocked there, attracted by that kind of degenerate teaching. But this was never part of the apostle's doctrine.

Third, Paul did not use

"deceit" (v.3) nor "flattering words" (v.5) to win converts. I appreciate his words along that line, when so many teachers today are appealing to our egos, to the macho instinct in us. They seem to be bold and uncompromising in their

Many teachers today promise prosperity in exchange for discipleship and entice followers with a formula for success and wealth.

approach, but they manifest every indication of sheer ego, and they disguise it by appearing to be simple teachers of the Word. What they are teaching has a degree of truth to it, but it is mixed with a great deal

of error. Tragically, many succumb to that kind of appeal.

Fourth, Paul did not promise prosperity in exchange for discipleship. Some leaders entice followers with the offer of a formula for success and wealth. This was not Paul's method. He did not use a "cloak for covetousness" (v.5). What an apt description of much we hear today! He would have nothing to do with these types of appeal. As we will see, he refused even to accept financial support from the Thessalonians, earning his own way as a tentmaker. He concentrated on giving them what they desperately needed—the message of the gospel—and he supported himself until they had received it.

Finally, Paul did not come to seek fame or status in the eyes of man. He wrote, "Nor did we seek

glory from men, either from you or from others" (v.6). He could have taken advantage of his position as an authorized spokesman for Jesus, but he did not want anything for himself. He did not slant his message, glossing over some of the unpleasant aspects of the truth, to appeal to the popular mind. He was honest and faithful, and ministered to them truthfully, regardless of whether he received any praise, glory, or thanks. None of these motives lay behind his preaching—not error, uncleanness, deceit, flattery, greed, nor ambition.

What did motivate Paul, then? What produced his kind of courage? The answer is in verse 4, "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts."

First, Paul was intensely grateful for the sheer honor of proclaiming the gospel, the good news about God. Four times in these verses (vv.2,4,8-9) he mentioned the gospel of God. He gloried in the fact that God had called him to deliver a message that people needed so desperately.

Why do people suffer heartbreak, loneliness, misery, and agony of spirit day in and day out throughout their lives? It is because they do not know the truth about God. They do not know the delivering power of Jesus Christ. They do not know the inner warmth, strength, and encouragement that can come from Christ living in them. God committed that message to Paul, as He does to us, so that we might share it with them. What an honor that is!

In all my years of preaching, nothing has

been more encouraging to me than to remind myself that I have already been given the greatest honor that can ever be given to a human being: to proclaim what Paul called “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). Could there be anything greater than that? That is how Paul felt, and it continually motivated him.

Not only was Paul grateful for the privilege of proclaiming God’s truth, but he was energized by a desire to please God. Now, the only reason anyone has a desire to please God is that he has learned to love Him. You never truly try to please God if you do not love God. You may try to please Him to get something for yourself, but if the impelling force within you is to please Him, it is because you have learned that God already loves you. That is why we sing so

many hymns about the love of God for us. Every Christian ought to recall regularly that marvelous event when “On Christ almighty vengeance fell, that would have sunk a world to hell. He bore it for a chosen race, and thus became our hiding place.” That is what drives us to want to please God.

***The desire
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overflows from
a heart that
loves Him.***

Certainly love was always Jesus’ motive for performance. He said, “I always do those things that please Him” (Jn. 8:29). He did not live and act as He did because He wanted something from God—all the treasures of heaven

could have been His at any moment—but because He loved the Father and wanted to please Him.

Bold, blustery Peter had a powerful experience with the Lord after the resurrection when he met Him by the Sea of Galilee. Three times Jesus asked Peter the searching question: “Do you love Me?” (Jn. 21:15-17). Finally, all Peter could say was, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You” (v.17). Love brought Peter back from the moment of his disobedience and weakness. He knew that he loved Jesus, because Jesus had first loved him.

Love is truly the wellspring of courage. If you need courage, do not try to summon it up from within yourself. Begin to think about the love of God, about the honor of walking with Him, and about speaking the truth

to others. Soon you will find yourself driven—compelled, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14, “Christ’s love compels us” (NIV). That was the secret of his courageous activity.

In addition to courage, there are two other characteristics of transformed leadership.

THE SECOND MARK OF TRANSFORMED LEADERSHIP: A LOVING SPIRIT (2:7-9)

Gentle Love. The apostle used a beautiful metaphor in his next words when he said, “We were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children” (v.7). There is a time for tough love, of course, but even then the sensitive leader finds ways to administer it gently. This love deeply desires to bless others and tenderly expresses concern.

When I was a young Christian, I came under the ministry of Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators. A strong personality, Dawson could be demanding. He was self-disciplined to an enormous degree, and he expected self-discipline of those who worked with him. But when I met alone with Dawson, he was always gentle. He spoke directly to me and seemed aware of my need and my capacity. I often thought of him as being like the apostle Paul. Paul could be stern and sharp, but when he was with someone alone, he was gentle. Gentleness is a mark of a true leader.

Nurturing Love. There is a second manifestation of a loving spirit in the words, “affectionately longing for you” (v.8). That is an unusual phrase, not often found in Scripture. Literally,

it means “a yearning, a longing for.” I sometimes feel this myself, especially when I am talking with young people. I feel my heart longing to help them, to bless them, to teach them, to lead them, to fulfill them. That is how parents feel about their children. There is a yearning after them, an affectionate desire to see them blossom and grow in the right direction.

Laboring Love.

A third mark of a loving spirit is found in verse 9, “For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.”

Paul knew the meaning of hard work. Every Jewish boy had to learn a trade, and Paul’s trade was tentmaking. Rather than take offerings from his new converts, he worked long hours into the night to earn his own living. Perhaps as

they listened to him teaching and instructing them during the daytime, the Thessalonians noticed that Paul’s hands were not the cultured, soft hands of a rich man who had never done manual labor. They were the calloused hands of one who worked hard at his trade.

*Long hours of
washing dishes and
mopping floors
may take their toll,
but work-worn
hands reflect a
loving heart.*

My wife thinks her hands are ugly because they are not as smooth and soft as they once were. But to me her hands are beautiful because they represent self-sacrificing

labor. Long hours washing dishes and mopping floors may take their toll, but work-worn hands reflect a loving heart.

THE THIRD MARK OF TRANSFORMED LEADERSHIP: FAITHFULNESS (2:10-12)

Faithfulness is the third and most important mark of an effective, transformed leader. The modern term *integrity* accurately expresses this. Paul was not boasting but reporting fact when he claimed to behave “devoutly and justly and blamelessly” (v.10).

The word *devout* (“holy” NIV) means “separate, intended for a single purpose.” In this sense, a good translation would be “single-minded.” The Old Testament speaks of the beauty of holiness, of someone who knows to whom he belongs and is

satisfied. Many think Paul was an egotist, a boaster who claimed things he had no right to claim. But whenever he spoke of his own holiness, Paul made it clear that he was not responsible for it. It was the grace of God at work in him.

***Rather than cover
up his sin, Paul
made it a practice
to confess it and
receive the
forgiveness of God.
This is why he
could claim
blamelessness.***

Also Paul was just (“righteous” NIV) before others. He behaved himself, resisting activities that could be misconstrued or would tend to mislead. In

Romans, he wrote that if his drinking wine or eating meat offended, he would refrain from them (14:14-23; cp. 1 Cor. 8:13). He was upright in his public behavior.

Finally, Paul was blameless in his own eyes. Do not misunderstand. Paul was not claiming sinlessness. What he meant was that he was honest. He had dealt with all his sin. Aware of it, he had not engaged in a coverup, but had confessed it and received the forgiveness of God.

A few years ago, a group of Southern California pastors met in small groups to discuss and share with one another how we keep ourselves vibrant and spiritually alive. One of the pastors particularly intrigued me. Only 35 years old, this man ministers to more than 10,000 people every Sunday morning. I

was interested in what he had to say about maintaining his spiritual vitality. Every morning he sits at his desk and writes across the top of a sheet of paper the letters *A-C-T-S*. The *A* stands for adoration; the *C* stands for confession; the *T* stands for thanksgiving; and the *S* stands for supplication.

Under the letter *A* he writes down all the things he can think of about the majesty, greatness, and glory of God. He does what Jesus taught us to do in the Lord's Prayer, which is to turn our thoughts to God first: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Mt. 6:9). Then he begins to contemplate the majesty of God, the greatness of His being, the love of His heart, the mercy He has manifested toward him—listing all those qualities as he goes. That is what the psalmist did: "Bless the

Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name” (Ps. 103:1).

Next he turns to confession, under C. “I write down the sins that I am aware of committing yesterday,” he said. “If it is Monday morning, and in my preaching Sunday I exaggerated in an illustration—I said it was a nine-car pileup when there were only six—I do not write that I exaggerated, but that I lied to the people. If I inadvertently kept some change that was given to me by mistake, I do not write down that I kept some money yesterday. I want to be hard on myself. I want to put it down in the worst possible way so I will face in myself these tendencies. I write, ‘I stole some money.’”

“Next,” he said, “I turn to thanksgiving, under T, and I begin to give thanks that I am forgiven for these

sins. One by one I cross them out and write, ‘forgiven, forgiven.’”

“Then under S for supplication, I pray and ask God for the strength not to do it again, but to be honest, careful, and thoughtful.”

No wonder that young man is being greatly used of God. My heart was delighted that such a young preacher would have such integrity. That is what we see here in Paul—thorough, ruthless honesty.

From that base of a faithful personal life, the apostle did three things for the Thessalonians. He exhorted them, he encouraged them, and he challenged them.

Exhortation usually takes the form of a rebuke. As I look back on the days when my children were growing up, I recall times when I had to sit down with them and say, “You

are headed for trouble. If you go down the path you are traveling now, you are going to hurt yourself and your family. You are going to destroy things of value in your life.” A father has to do that. So does a pastor at times. And so will you if you want to minister effectively to someone’s needs.

***Exhortation,
encouragement,
and challenge are
essential if you’re
going to minister
effectively to
someone’s needs.***

But along with exhortation comes encouragement and challenge. I have to confess, as I look back

on my relationships with my children, there was not enough of that. Encouragement says, “You are doing better. I can see changes. You are going to make it. I am with you. Keep on.” Encouragement is pointing out the positive value of things.

I have to confess with sadness that I also didn’t give my children enough challenge, of saying to them: “You are meant for better things. You do not have to live like this. There are great possibilities before you. God is leading you and calling you and urging you to lay hold of those.” That is what Paul did here. He pointed out that it is God who calls us into His own kingdom and glory.

These are surely “times that try men’s souls.” We are facing times of great danger and crisis. But these are also times of great possibilities. What

a challenge to live today as Paul lived and ministered in his day! As I review his record and find these three marks of an effective leader's heart— courage, a loving spirit, and faithfulness—I have to pray, “Lord, do this in my life. Make me a blessing in my own time.”

This booklet, *Transformed Lives*, is based on a portion of the book *Waiting For The Second Coming* by Ray Stedman (1917-1992). Ray ministered to Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, for 40 years. A graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, he authored a number of books for Discovery House Publishers, a nonprofit affiliate of RBC Ministries. His books include: *Body*

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