

If midweekchurch were on the hunt for a new minister, rather than just being stuck with me, what sort of person would you want? What qualities must they possess? What attributes would you like them to have and what personalities traits do you want to avoid?

One Church growth expert has said *“It has been stated that those undertaking the work of ministry in a modern parish with its insatiable demands, nothing less is required than the strength of an ox, the tenacity of a bulldog, the daring of a lion, the patience of a donkey, the industry of a beaver, the vision of an eagle, the meekness of a lamb, the hide of the rhino, the disposition of an angel, the loyalty of an apostle, the heroism of a martyr, the faithfulness of a prophet, the zeal of an evangelist, and the devotion of a mother. And on top of that you will be required to preach like an archangel on Sunday and visit like a postman during the week.”*

Which of course sounds next to impossible doesn't it? But when we turn back to the book of 1 Thessalonians we find another model of ministry, the apostle Paul's model of ministry. Last week when we were looking at chapter 1, he discussed what the model Church looked like, and we saw that there is no perfect Church but that we as individuals are called to model what the Christian gospel looks like. And today when we turn to chapters 2 and 3 we are going to be presented with what a model ministry looks like.

Now before you mentally switch off and say, “well that doesn't apply to me”, don't forget the minister is not the only one involved in ministry. In fact one of the distinctive thoughts that came out of the Reformation and on which the Presbyterian Church was formed upon was, we don't have two classes of Christians, the clergy and the laity, but just one. We are all on the one level and we all have a ministry.

It reminds me of the sign board outside a Church that I once saw that read St Andrews Presbyterian Church. Ministers, everyone. So both you and I are ministers (because the word minister means servant.) And both you and I have a ministry. And if we are going to have a good ministry rather than a bad ministry we had better learn from the Apostle Paul about how he ministered to the people at Thessalonica.

**1.** And the first thing we will notice, when we turn to those chapters is that ministry needs to have a **true motivation**. Look with me at v 1 to 6 and especially verse 3. *“For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.”*

The motivation for ministry is not deception, nor is it based on error. It doesn't try and appeal to men's hearts, according to v 4, nor does it use flattery or greed, according to v 5. But the motivation for what we do is to please God and not get praise from men.

Do you see what Paul is saying? If we are going to do something attached to the Christian faith we have to do so from true motives. For quite simply if we don't have pure motives, people will see through us and realise that we are religious fakes. And they will reject the good news about Jesus that is on our lips.

Now an example of how this works is some of the tele evangelists on early morning TV. It seems to me that some of them don't have true motivation. Someone like Creflo Dollar for example apparently owns a whole fleet of private jets and yet is always asking for the viewers money. No wonder many people say that if he is a spokesman for God I won't have anything to do with Him!

For their needs to be an integrity about our motivation. There needs to be a transparent desire within us to please God, not to please ourselves. To care for others not just boost our ego. To do it out of love not because we are forced to.

And that is why in this Church we might ask for your help in doing things but we try not to pressure people into doing things. We send the plate around, but we don't force you to give. For if you minister because you feel you have no choice in the matter, then you are ministering with the wrong motivation. And if you give because we place a gun at your head, it can do more harm than good.

And that is also why, when we do something in this Church we do it for free. Free dinner, free homework help etc Because we don't want the people of Terranora to think that we are just after their money. But as servants of God, who want to tell them about a message of God's free gift, God's grace, we need to offer it to them graciously, freely, without any strings attached.

So I ask you, when you do something for the Lord, check your motivation. Don't do it to get more brownie points. Don't do it because you have to. Do it to please God. Do it because God has entrusted us with his good news. Do it out of love and care and concern for others. And don't wait to be asked. Find a way where you can administer your spiritual gifts, but make sure you are doing it out of true motivation. Make sure you act with an integrity, a manner that is beyond reproach.

**2. True Nurture (v.7-12)** For Paul not only models a true motivation but true nurture as well. For within v 7-12, he points out that he was as gentle amongst them as a mother. In fact he was more than that, he was like a breast feeding mum, who shared with them not only the gospel of God but his own life as well. Paul was not someone who was harsh with the Thessalonians, he nurtured them and cherished them like they were his very own children.

For it takes time and effort to raise a child and it takes time and effort to help young Christians to grow. So Paul didn't just turn his converts over to baby-sitters, he made sacrifices and cared for them himself. He didn't just teach them with words only, he modelled with his example what it was like to live the Christian life. He was there to help them grow and develop in the faith.

That reminds me of the father who was trying to explain the concept of marriage to his 4-year-old daughter. He got out their wedding album, thinking visual images would help, and explained the entire wedding service to her. When he was finished, he asked her if she had any questions. She pointed to a picture of the wedding party and asked, "Daddy, is that when mummy came to work for us?"

The best example of this sort of nurture is our own mothers & Paul is saying that is how we should nurture the other people in our Church. That is how we should conduct ourselves so that those who are weak in the faith may become strong. Not jump down on their mistakes, but gently nurture them. Don't always tell them where they are going wrong, be patient with them. As the old saying goes, "*People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.*"

But true nurture isn't just like being a mother, Paul says he was like a father who worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone. He was like a dad who dealt with his children in an encouraging and comforting manner and yet still was someone who urged them to live lives worthy of God.

I don't know whether you had a father like that? I was fortunate, I had a dad who did encourage me, who did urge me on to make something of my life. But I didn't have a dad who showed me the urgency of living a life worthy of God. But that is one of the great jobs that Dads have been given. So guys, don't leave the teaching about God just to the ladies. Don't think your role is just about work and providing for your family. It is also about being there for your children, no matter their age & it is about modelling for them what a Christian looks like.

Ann Gilbert writes; "*To help our four year old overcome her fear of the dark, her father and I always reassured her at bedtime that God was watching over her. One night after I had gone to bed, I felt a soft tap on my shoulder. "Mommy, Daddy" a familiar small voice spoke up, "I know God's in there with me, but I need somebody with skin."*

We are God's representatives with skin on, we are to model the presence of God to our children and to those whom God has placed around us in the Church. Some of them haven't had good experiences with their real mums and dads. Some are caught up in the washing machine of life. Some are like the prodigal son and have wandered away from their heavenly Father. And it is our ministry, as Christians, to model the gentleness of a mum and the urging of a dad. True

motivation, true nurture & in verses 13-16 we see true encouragement.

**3. True Encouragement (v.13-16)** For Paul also knew that part of his ministry was the gift of encouragement. Yes at times they needed to be exhorted but often they also needed to be encouraged. But notice how Paul encouraged the Thessalonians. He didn't say, "Wow, you are doing a great job", or "Keep up the good work"

Instead he said, in v 13 "*we also thank God continually because you heard the word of God, you believed it, & you imitated.*" So do you see what he has done?

He has managed to encourage the Thessalonians while at the same time pointing them to the one who is doing all the hard work, their God. He tells them "it's great that you are growing in your faith" but at the same time lest they get proud he also points out that God's word is actually the thing that is at work in them and it is the thing that is making the real difference.

Paul knows they have made a great start, but the thing that will help them finish in the end, is the word of God and the providence of God. So while he pats them on the back, at the same time he is directing their gaze back to their awesome God.

And as we minister to others we need to be like Paul. We need to find ways where we get alongside one another, where we give credit where credit is due, where we reverse the trend in our society where some one has found out that the average person says 10 negative things for every one positive thing. And as we minister together in this place, wouldn't it be great if our speech was filled with thankfulness to God and encouragement to others like that which is modelled here by the apostle Paul? True motivation, true nurture, true encouragement and

**4. True Concern (2:17 to 3:8)** For Paul was like this with the Thessalonians but he was soon driven out of town by those who opposed his message. These chapters show he tried time & again to come back and see them. But he was stopped by Satan each time. He had this incredible concern for these people that he didn't stop praying for them or writing letters to them or sending others to see how they were. They were *not out of sight, out of mind*. He wants so much for them to keep going forward in the faith that he is on an emotional roller coaster.

So much so that his concern leads to action. According to 3:1, when he could stand it no longer he sent Timothy. The trials got too high that he knew he had to act. He needed Timothy where he was at Corinth, but they needed him even more. They needed his strength and encouragement and so Paul sends them to the Thessalonians.

And isn't that the sort of concern we should have for our fellow

Christians? They are going through a rough patch, so shouldn't we be wrestling with them in prayer? They are away for a couple of weeks, don't we long to find out how they are going? We miss a week at Church and don't we want to come more so the next week to find out how everyone is going? Don't we get great joy and satisfaction seeing others grow in their faith? For that is what the Church is really all about. Its not about me, its about us all together growing in the faith.

For Paul is consumed with people. Not programmes. Not buildings. Not finances. But people. Thomas Monaghan, the founder & president of Domino's pizza, the man who grew a local pizzeria into a business with sales in their billions of dollars, was once asked to account for the phenomenal growth of the company. And he answered, "I programmed everything for growth, everyday we develop people, the key to growth is developing people. Not special cheese, or tasty crust or fast delivery but people"

He's right isn't he? Not just in business but also in the Church. It is all about growing people, in their faith. And to do that we need a true concern, true encouragement, true nurture and true motivation.

Let me end with an example of what these chapters are talking about. Hudson Taylor was an incredible man of God sent to be a missionary in difficult times in China. And he made an incredible impact. Such an impact that years after his death the communist government in China commissioned an author to write a biography of Hudson Taylor with the purpose of distorting the facts and presenting him in a bad light. They wanted to discredit the name of this wonderful missionary of the gospel.

But as the author was doing his research, he was increasingly impressed by Taylor's saintly character and godly life, and he found it extremely difficult to carry out his assigned task with a clear conscience. Eventually, at the risk of losing his life, he laid aside his pen, renounced his atheism, and received Jesus as his personal Saviour. It wasn't primarily the way Hudson Taylor preached, taught, or wrote that led this man to Christ, but the way he lived his life.

Will anyone say that about us? Will anyone say that about our Church? That our lives perfectly balance our ministry which points back to God's good news. What a challenge, to minister in such away this week and beyond that people may not just hear but see the wonderful gospel of Jesus in both our words and our lives.

Lets pray...

Dear Lord as Paul says at the end of this passage, Night and day we pray most earnestly (for one another) that we may supply what is lacking in each other's faith. May the Lord make our love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else. May you

strengthen our hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. And may you make us good ministers, good servants of your, so that everyone can see your love, your encourage, your concern working through our lives. Amen.

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And here's the other key to the model. A ministry of both **passion**. And **compassion**. A ministry that shared the **word** of Jesus. And demonstrated it in **life**.

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Paul says we were gentle, we were like a mother to you. We loved you, nourished you, cherished you, protected you just like a mother would for her children. This was a mark of his godliness and a mark of his ministry. Gentleness towards these babies in Christ was a mark of his ministry amongst them. Just as we are patient with a baby, caring for its needs, giving special time and attention to it – so was Paul and Silas towards these Christian babies. Paul speaks of a deep loving intimate relationship with them. One in which he shares his life with them. You see Paul walked with them and did not just work with and amongst them. That is very important and something we need to remember in the church today. We must learn to walk together before we work together. I am not sure who it was said ‘in order to know a man walk a mile in his shoes.’ Liam Neeson said he did not know the character of Schindler until he put on a pair of his shoes and then he knew exactly how to play him in the film. Paul and Silas shared their lives with these young Christians – it bore fruit and know it was bearing testimony to the truth of their ministry and the gospel message amongst them. Paul concludes this part of the letter by stating that he was no burden to them at all. He calls them to remember that contrary to what the opposition is saying about him he claimed no financial assistance from them. In fact if they would cast their minds back he toiled, he laboured as a tentmaker to pay his way. Paul has defended his manner of ministry amongst them by asking them to remember how he and Silas loved them, were gentle with them, how they lived amongst them and how they supported themselves so as not to be a burden to them.

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#### APPLICATION

I believe what God is saying to us from this passage this morning is this:

Live lives in this community that are above reproach. Live lives which commend the gospel – lives which even when your opponents accuse you – you will be able to point to how you lived as vindication of the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been entrusted to you. You have been approved by God and now you are required to live in a way that the message of the gospel is not derided, denied or denigrated because the messenger does not live accordingly. People read the gospel according to your life – what are they reading – holiness or hypocrisy.

Secondly I believe God is calling us all as a community of Christian believers to walk together and then we can work together. I believe he

is calling us to model here at HTW a Christian community wherein people not only share the gospel but share their lives. That will mean taking a risk and opening your life up to others. But it is one of the commitments I asked of you all when I shared the vision for this church in the years ahead – to be in a relationship for spiritual growth. Are you, are we, prepared and willing to share our lives so that people will see our gentleness and be more open to the gospel.

Finally can I leave you with this one challenge: if someone was to libel you this morning could you like Paul appeal to your life as a believer to vindicate your character. Paul did not go on the offensive. He did not attack his opponents character – no. Instead he pointed to his motives and his manner of living and allowed the facts of those to bear testimony to the falsehood of the slander. I hope and pray we would be able to do the same.

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Just as the Thessalonians Church was a model for all believers -- it is equally true that the Apostle Paul is a model for all leaders.

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They need to stay focus, keep the main thing the main thing. They can not allow themselves to be distracted from their goal.

{Taj Mahal story)

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A Junior High science teacher lectured on the properties of magnets for an entire class. The next day he gave his students a quiz. The first question read like this: “My name begins with an “M,” has six letters, and I pick things up. What am I?” Half the kids in the class wrote, “Mother.”

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It’s like the little boy who said to his dad, “Let’s play darts dad. I’ll throw and you say great shot!”

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There was once a jockey who had an unbelievable winning record. Just before the end of any race, the jockey would elan way over and seemlily speak to the horse. A reporter asked the jockey what he did that made such a difference in the horse’s speed. He replied: “I simply quote a little verse in his ear: “roses are red, violets are blue; Horses that lose are made into glue!”

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Speak gentle words. I love this little prayer: "Lord, make my words soft and gentle today because I may have to eat them tomorrow!"

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In Simi Valley, California, June 11, 2004, at the casket side of former president Ronald Reagan, Michael Reagan recounted that on a flight from Washington to California in 1988, his father told him "about his love of God, his love of Christ as his Savior."

"I did not know then what it all meant, but I certainly, certainly know now," Michael Reagan said. "I can't think of a better gift for a father to give a son, and I hope to honor my father by giving my son Cameron and my daughter Ashley that very same gift he gave to me" (Baptist Press, June 15, 2004), making reference to the Gospel of Christ.

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James Street (Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 1) "A pastor needs the tact of a diplomat, the strength of Samson, the patience of Job, the wisdom of Solomon--and a cast-iron stomach."

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A critical distinctive of the Reformation was the priesthood of every Christian, that every follower of Jesus Christ is a priest who has direct access to God through Jesus. The Reformers reminded us that we don't have to go through a human intermediaries like an pastors priests, bishops or even popes to get to God. Every follower of Jesus has free access to God through Jesus, thus breaking down the myth that ordinary Christians are second class citizens in God's eyes.

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