



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Take a Look Back

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Part 2
Steve Lombardo | January 17, 2016 | 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12



We're continuing our series called "Ready." We want to be ready for a lot of things. We want to be ready for life, we want to be ready for Christ's return, and we want to be ready for death. We want to be prepared for all that God would have for us.

This is a worship service and so we come together to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. There are primarily believers here who have come to worship Jesus Christ and study God's Word together. But then there are other people here—and maybe you're one of them—who are unbelievers. Or maybe you're not certain about your faith and you could be here for any number of reasons. Maybe a neighbor invited you. We're happy you're here. Maybe you're interested in the Bible and Jesus and you want to know how this all works out historically and in your own life. This is a great place to examine the case of Christianity and the true story of Jesus Christ. We're happy you're here. Maybe you're here because your family dragged you here. They pulled you out of bed and said, "You're coming to church!" We're happy you're here, too. God wants to get your attention as well. I pray that He does that today.

Let me ask you a question: Are you a Christian? Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? Let me ask another question: Why are you a Christian? Think about your life. Why do you do the things that you do? In 2012 there was a long study completed. A hospice nurse surveyed hundreds of people in their last twelve weeks of life and asked them what their biggest regrets were. One common regret was people felt like they never truly did what they wanted to do with their lives. They always felt like they were trying to please other people and having to be someone they weren't. Why do you do the things that you do? What are you investing in? Why are you a Christian?

There are five reasons people call themselves Christians, and only the last one is the correct reason:

1. Their parents or grandparents are Christians. "My family is Christian. We were raised Christian. We don't go to church all the time, and I never read the Bible, but I do say a prayer when I'm in trouble. That's who I am. I'm a Christian because my parents are Christians."
2. Their friends are Christians. "My friends are Christians. They go to youth group and I go with them. I have fun with them. They have good activities. I'm part of a church family. What a blessing to be part of a family! I'm a Christian because I get to be part of a church and I'm loved and cared for by others. I know that there are other people in the church who care for me."
3. They want to be healed. "I've experienced a lot of physical pain, anguish, disease or sickness. I know Jesus healed people and I see Jesus healing people today. I watch TV programs and I see Jesus healing people there. I'm a Christian because I want to be healed."
4. They want to be prosperous. "If I do what's right and if I'm a Christian then God has to bless me."
5. (The correct answer) They are sinners in need of a Savior and Jesus is their Savior. "I believe Jesus died for me. He paid for my sin. He died but then He rose again, purchasing my salvation and giving me victory despite my sin. He has given me forgiveness. It's not a feeling; it's a fact. At the cross of Christ, He delivers forgiveness. He rose from the dead, giving

salvation to all who believe. I believe and embrace that with my life. I am a Christian because I've accepted the truth of Jesus and now I'm living it out externally. I don't do it perfectly all the time, but I seek to live for Jesus Christ." That's who a Christian is.

As you look back today, along with the Apostle Paul, take stock of your life. Why do you do the things that you do? If you're a Christian this can be convicting because you're going to come across some of your sin just like I did this past week while preparing this sermon. If you're not a Christian I'm going to challenge you to look with fresh eyes at the truth of Jesus Christ in our passage. Maybe, just maybe, God will grab you today for eternity.

The Apostle Paul is taking a look back on the ministry of the gospel among the people in Thessalonica. We too, are encouraged to take a look back at the ministry that God has entrusted to us.

Let's read 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12:

¹For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ²But 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. ³For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴but 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. ⁵For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸So, 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.

⁹For 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. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹²we 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.

Let's recap for a brief moment what we've learned so far. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Thessalonica. Historians believe that Paul was in Corinth when he wrote to the Thessalonians. In 1 Corinthians 2:3, Paul says, *"And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling."* So Paul and his fellow gospel travelers were going around trying to plant churches in these different cities. He came to Corinth weak, trembling, and in fear. Why was he like that? Because he had been beaten down. He had tried to start churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. In Athens he spoke to the philosophizers and wise thinkers of the day on Mars Hill, but he didn't have much success there. Only a few people became believers. So Paul was beat down time after time. In Philippi and Thessalonica people started turning to Christ and things were going well, but then some of the Jewish society rose up and kicked Paul out of the city. He was beaten down. Nothing was going well. The church wasn't growing. People weren't being saved like they needed to be. So Paul was in Corinth, trembling and weak.

Then Timothy and Silas (Silvanus) came to him with good news: Christians were growing in Thessalonica. The church was doing well and standing firm. Paul got this news and it pumped him up. So he recalled his ministry in verses 1–12 as he looked back on the time he had in Thessalonica. He heard the good report, and it caused him to look back on his time there. That's also what we're going to do today.

1. What Paul did: he proclaimed the gospel and it was not in vain.

You know Paul's story. Before his name was Paul it was Saul. Saul persecuted Christians, including Stephen. Saul was a Pharisee and was very zealous for the faith. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He saw this rising sect as a potential threat against the true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So he worked with all of his might to squelch this movement called The Way that was proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Messiah (Acts 9:2).

Then he was on the road to Damascus and met Jesus face to face. Jesus said, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* (Acts 9:4). Isn't it interesting that Jesus said Saul was persecuting Him? We are part of the body of Christ. Saul was transformed into Paul. He was saved and then he was commissioned to preach the gospel.

I want to show you an amazing thing that happened when God turned Saul into Paul. In 1 Corinthians 9:16 Paul writes this about preaching the gospel: *"For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"* The call on Paul's life to preach the gospel was so strong that he had to do it. He said, *"Woe to me!"* That means, *"I'm going to hell if I don't preach and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ."* This is who Saul became after his conversion.

So he looks back and sees that even though he thought the work in Thessalonica was in vain, it wasn't. Believers were growing. Let's look back at the good news that Timothy and Silas brought to Paul 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8:

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

Paul's work there was not in vain. There were Christians on fire for Jesus Christ in Thessalonica, so much so that Paul didn't even have to speak about it because he said everybody already knew. Paul proclaimed the gospel and it wasn't in vain. Paul would go on to give the rest of his life for Jesus Christ and to plant as many churches as possible. He spread the gospel as far and wide in the known world as possible. Jesus is the foundation of the church and the apostles, including Paul, went out to take the gospel to the Gentiles. We're here today because of the testimony and work of God through the life of Paul.

Now take a look back at your life. Here's the question for us: **What have you done with your dash?** I'm talking about the dash that shows up between your birthdate and your death date. That's where we all are right now. Some of us are closer to the left side and some of us are closer to the right side. We don't know where we are right now but we're all in the dash at this moment. Take a look back and ask what you have done with it. You say, "I've done almost nothing compared to Paul! You just talked about Paul spreading the gospel over the entire known world. Thank you, Pastor! I feel like junk now. I can't do anything like that." God doesn't call everyone to grandiose things, but God does call everyone to be faithful to what He has given us.

Jesus said it this way in Luke 16:10: *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."* God is calling you to be faithful with the ministry that He has given you. You're not called to Paul's ministry, or your mom's ministry, or your grandparents' ministry, or your kids' ministry. You're called to be faithful to your ministry.

2. How Paul did it: he proclaimed the gospel with boldness in the midst of conflict.

We see this in verse two: *"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."* Conflict followed Paul everywhere he went. Turn to Acts 9. There we see the story of the conversion of Saul, which ends in verse 19. Now look at verse 20: *"And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'"* This is Saul, who was a murderous accuser of Christians, was just saved. Then it says:

And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name?"... When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

This is the beginning of the life and ministry of Paul and right away it's marked with conflict.

In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas were proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch. Starting in verse 47 it says:

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

People were being saved. People were turning to Jesus Christ. This was awesome! The power of God was at work. *"But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."* More conflict, more persecution, but it was met with boldness as Paul, Barnabas and Timothy shared the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 14 Paul is stoned. That's not fun. But afterwards he strengthens the other believers. Starting in verse 22 it says that Paul was *"...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."* How many of you have experienced tribulations? How has that affected the way you live your life for Jesus Christ? **How bold are you in your witness for Jesus Christ?** Do people even know about your faith?

I look back with shame on my junior high years. My oldest boy is almost to junior high age and I have to force myself to remember what it was like to be in his shoes. Everything is a pressure cooker with peer pressure, having to be a certain way, act a certain way, worrying about being liked or disliked or being bullied. I lived in an area where most of my friends were Catholic so they knew about the priests. My dad was a pastor and I remember being ashamed that he was a pastor. The teacher would go

around the classroom and ask, "What do your parents do?" I'd say, "My dad is a pastor." And the other students would say, "Is that like a priest? I didn't think priests could have wives." So I was ashamed. I'm ashamed now that I was ashamed then. Do people know about your faith in Jesus?

Here are some common excuses:

- "I don't know enough to tell people about Jesus. I don't know everything like a pastor does." That's an excuse! The gospel of Jesus Christ is so simple that even a child can believe it.
- "I don't know any nonbelievers." That could be true for you. You may not know many nonbelievers, but we're called to take the Word wherever we go. You ever get coffee? Does your barista know Jesus? Do they know that you're bold for Jesus Christ? Not in an annoying way, but that's just who you are. You are a follower of Jesus.
- "I don't want to offend anyone. Faith is a personal thing." Tell that to Paul who was bold in his witness in every city and town he entered. If you're concerned about offending someone, think about the offense when they will stand before a righteous God condemned to hell and you never opened your mouth to say anything.

3. Why Paul did it: he did it in order to please God and love others.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-8, Paul tells us what were not his reasons for sharing the gospel. He says they didn't do it to deceive. They didn't do it to please people. They didn't do it to make money. They didn't do it to get glory.

We were out of state this past week and on Sunday I got to go to several different churches. There are no perfect churches but I definitely saw a lot of people pleasing. There was a lot of "look at me" worship. It's a struggle, even for Christians today, to proclaim and preach the gospel for the correct reasons.

What are the correct reasons? We see it in the end of verse four. Paul was proclaiming the gospel *"to please God who tests our hearts."* In verses seven and eight he tells us it's because he loved people. *"But we were gentle among you... 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."* We believe in Jesus and live for Him; we tell others about Him to please God and to love other people. Jesus says it this way in Mark 12:28-31:

"Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Pure motives in sharing the gospel are love for God and love for others.

Why and how do you live? How pure are your motives? Do you love God? There are two parts to loving God: 1) accept Him as He is, which means you play by His rules, and 2) live for Him. It's twofold: believe and accept, then live out your faith. That's how you love God.

This past week I had the opportunity to visit a small group different from the one I normally lead. I like to go around and visit all of our small groups and see what God is doing there. I was really encouraged by the group I visited this past week. We had a good time studying together. I was just hanging back and watching. Some people were sharing some different things about Village Bible Church. Somebody in the group shared how at first they felt a little taken aback because there's a lot of law preached at Village Bible Church but that now they were beginning to see, feel and experience that it's out of love that we preach the truth of all of God's Word and not just the easy parts. So they were thankful for that. That encouraged me. I like being part of that—a place where you hear the truth spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15) and where you're taught to love other people to the point of action. It's easy to say, "I love my neighbor" but not do anything about it. To love your neighbor means you're moved to action.

As I've taken a look back over my life, I see some major failures in this area, especially in the last year and a half since my family moved to a new town and started a new pastoral position here. I was really involved at the church, thinking about the church and meeting new people in the church, then I realized I don't even know my neighbors. I was talking to my wife Stephanie and said, "We're rotten neighbors." Some of our neighbors came over and brought us Christmas gifts. I thought, "Wow! What am I doing? Do I even know anybody?" I have not reached out to the people God has placed right around me. Lord, forgive me for that. Remind me of the calling to love my neighbor. So with God's help we'll seek to reach our neighbors for Jesus Christ. Hopefully God will even bring them to this church.

4. How serious was Paul about the mission? He worked day and night!

Look at verse nine: *"For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you."* So they worked to support themselves in the work of the church so as not to be a burden to the people in Thessalonica. As pastoral staff, we know that Tim is bi-vocational. He pastors here but he also runs a catering company. Then you have the rest of us who work in the ministry of the church and by God's grace and by your generosity we're provided for. I was just talking to Pastor Mario this past week and we were both saying how blown away we are to be part of Village Bible Church. We get to work hard in gospel work and in the ministry of loving God and loving others, and we get to do it for a living, and our families are taken care of and our needs are met. What an awesome blessing that is! Thank you for that.

How serious are you about fulfilling God's calling upon your life? Are you fairly certain about what God has called you to in your life? Take a moment and write down one or two major things that you're fairly certain God has called you to do. Who has He called you to be? If God has called you to these things, are you working day and night to make them happen? How serious was Paul about the mission? He worked day and night.

The top regret among men in hospice care in that 2012 study was that they spent too much time working. They wished they could have relived the time when their kids were growing up. They wished they could have been with their spouses more and experienced more of life together. God's given some of you work. That's your calling, so work hard at it! Work day and night at it. But remember this: the bigger call is the call of the gospel. Men, you are to be pastors to your own home first and then reach out to your neighbors and community.

5. Was Paul the real deal? He worked to be holy, righteous and blameless as he charged the Thessalonians to do the same.

We see this in the end of our text in verses 10–12:

You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, 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.

To charge them means this was a serious thing. Paul says, "Walk in a manner worthy of God Almighty. Have faith in Jesus Christ and live for Him!" As they preached that, they also lived it.

Do you practice what you preach? Take an honest look back and ask yourself that question. It's easy to talk a big game, but it's harder to back it up.

I was watching an episode of The Andy Griffith Show and a big bully was threatening little Opie. This kid was a lot bigger than every other kid and Opie said, "I'm going to finally stand up for myself and my friends." So this big bully comes up and says, "So you're a big tough guy now. You want to fight me?" And Opie put up his hands. The bully says, "Okay. I'm going to draw a line. If you cross that line you're going to fight me." Opie crossed the line. So the bully says, "Okay, now I'm going to draw a circle around me and if you come into the circle then I'll fight you and you're going to get yours." And Opie went into the circle. Then the bully said, "You're lucky I've got my new jeans on. Maybe we can do this some other time." And the bully left.

It's easy to preach and talk. It's harder to walk the walk. But Paul did it. His fellow workers in the gospel did it. They didn't do it perfectly. They didn't do it all the time. We're all sinners. We have times of falling and failure. But at the end of the day we're going to live the way that we talk.

Maybe you're looking back and you're saying, "I've failed in a lot of these things." Here's the great thing about God: He is full of grace, mercy, love and compassion. He's a gracious God. Today you have breath. There's always hope when you have breath. If you've failed as a believer in the past and you haven't taken it seriously, you still have breath. Recommit to the Lord today to live and follow the example of Paul, living for Jesus Christ. We do this with His help.

If you're an unbeliever today, you have breath so there is hope. Jesus died for you. God loves you. Receive Him today! Be forgiven and live for Him today and tomorrow.