

As a Mother Cares for Her Children

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16



by Mickey Cook

Background: In this time of crisis whom do we trust? Some leaders exude empathy and act for the common good; others seek sympathy and act out of self-interest. Amid charges of fake media, left and right seem isolated in echo chambers, watching CNN and Fox News. Clickbait misleads to sites pursuing eyeballs and profits not truth. In Thessalonica the opponents of the fledgling church were attacking Paul's integrity and motives. Paul writes a self-defense of his behavior. Like a babe, he was innocent of insincerity, delusion, impure motives, trickery, flattery, hidden greed, and pursuit of praise. Instead, he nurtured the Christians like a nursing mother caring for her little ones, like a father encouraging and comforting his children, urging them to a life worthy of their calling as God's beloved children. Paul has a lot to tell us about what true Christian leadership does and does not look like.

Sermon Text: 1 Thess 2:1-16 (NIV)

1 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. 2 We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. 7 Instead, we were like young children among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8 so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. 9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- a. As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out to you most?
- b. What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- c. What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?

2. Sermon questions (pick 3)

- a. We read the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10) as our Scripture Reading, and it was front and center in the children's sermon and in Bernard's sermon. How can you practically help one of your neighbors this week, in the vein of being a "Good Samaritan" (Some options may include buying groceries, dropping off fruit from your trees, making a phone call, sending an email, praying, etc.)?
- b. Where do you typically go for comfort and care? Is the Lord a safe option for you in uncertain times like we are in right now? Why or why not?
- c. Bernard said multiple times, "It's going to be all right, but it may not be easy." Reflect on that statement. Is it a hopeful statement for you? Why or why not?
- d. What voices are you primarily listening to right now? What voices are you trusting at the moment? With all the noise from the media and internet, how do you hear the voice of God in these times?
- e. Make the Generosity prayer your daily morning prayer this week:
"Dear Lord teach me to be generous; teach me to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your will. Amen."

– Attributed to St. Ignatius (but probably written much later)