January 21/22, 2023

The Marks of Gospel Ministry

A People of Hope Series

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Pastor Ryan Harmon

Well, each week, as we gather together and we open up this book of 1 Thessalonians, we are going to be challenged to consider what it means to be a people of hope in the midst of a world filled with struggle and with strife. Certainly an aspect of what it means to be a person of hope, to be a people of hope, is that we are a people intent on proclaiming the name of Jesus and representing Him in the world.

So, I want to begin this morning with a question for you. When it comes to letting the world know about Jesus, making Him known, which is more important: the things that we say or the way that we live? Is it more important that we say the right things, that we proclaim the things that are true in just the right way, or is it more important that we live it out in an accurate way? That's what we want to consider together here this morning as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians in Chapter two. So, turn with me now in your Bible to chapter 2 of 1 Thessalonians.

Now, of course, Paul is a great person to consider this question with, because there's just never been anyone quite like Paul. Paul, in some ways, set the world on fire as he went around proclaiming. Now last week, Josh opened the book of Thessalonians with us, and he gave us some context. We're not going to go over all of that context again. Some of it might come up as we go through this text. But I do just want to draw out one interesting point. Of all the places that Paul visited, one thing that is incredibly unique about this city of Thessalonica is that he was only with them ministering for three weeks. Three weeks on the ground with the Thessalonians, but God did an astounding work in those three weeks. Let's look at what he has to say as we walk through chapter 2 of 1 Thessalonians. Verse 1:

> **For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,**
>
> (*NASB 1 Thessalonians 2:1)

I'm going to stop there. **You yourselves know that our coming to you was not in vain**… It's interesting throughout 1 Thessalonians, a couple of times in chapter 1, but then here multiple times in chapter 2, we're going to read something like, "*You yourselves know*" or, "*As you know*", to tell us that Paul is not offering up new information, but he is seeking to remind them of that which they already know. I think this raises an interesting question. "Why is he doing that?" "Why is he so intent on reminding them of that which they already know?" I think if we just look for a moment in our own lives, we can see part of the reason why he would do that. I think in our own lives, we know that sometimes reminders can serve to encourage us to remain steadfast and remain committed to that which we already know. Sometimes a timely reminder can be something that strengthens our resolve if we're struggling or if things are difficult. We don't need new information, but we do need a reminder, and a reminder fortifies us. It strengthens us. I think that's precisely what Paul is doing here in 1 Thessalonians 2, as he reminds the Thessalonians over and over again about his time with them. He's seeking to fortify them, to build up confidence, to encourage them

to persevere, and continue down the path they have already been walking. Now you remember that Paul, in 1 Thessalonians, as Josh opened last week, he reminded us that Paul was run out of the city. There were people that were strongly opposed to him and make no mistake, after he left, I don't think those opposers thought, "Okay, I guess our job is done." I think they directed their opposition towards this new fledgling, young group of believers. So Paul is seeking to encourage them, to remind them of his ministry among them, that they might be strengthened and fortified to persevere and to continue. In some ways, verse 1 kind of picks up where verse 5 of chapter 1 left off. In chapter 1, verse 5, Paul says***. . . you yourselves know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*** And in what follows, we're going to get a description of what kind of men they were, what their ministry was like. So verse 2:

> **. . . but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.**

Paul reminded us last week that in Philippi, Paul and Silas and Timothy were persecuted. There were slanderous, scandalous accusations being made. Essentially, they were being accused of causing a riot, causing almost a rebellion against Caesar himself. It was an accusation of sedition, something that would be punishable by death. And so they left, and I think all of us would agree that if we heard Paul say, "You know, after that, that was pretty traumatic and we decided to take a little R&R. We went down the coast. We found a nice Airbnb down on the coast, and we just kind of kicked our feet up a little bit because that was pretty difficult," I think all of us would have been like, "Makes sense. Makes sense, Paul." But that's not what he did, is it? No, they just continued right on. They moved to the next city, and Paul says that with a **boldness in our God**, with God-confidence, they just proceeded to proclaim the very thing that was getting them in all sorts of trouble in Philippi. It was an incredible, courageous, daring act, by Paul and by Silas and Timothy. And you can just imagine, for the people in Thessalonica, how encouraging this must have been, as they were facing opposition themselves. You can imagine what it would be like for them to remember, "Oh, I know the context of Paul and Silas and Timothy. I know how they came in, and we want to continue down that same path, being faithful to the same call." In persevering in the midst of opposition, they were just following in the footsteps of the one who brought the message to them in the first place. And Paul modeled what ministry looks like—this incredible mark of ministry that is rooted and grounded in confidence and boldness in God, and God alone. That's what drove Paul. As he continues in verse 3, he's going to draw out even more detail about his manner of life among them. He says,

> **For our exhortation** (our preaching) **does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.** (Vs. 3-6)

Now, a little context is helpful for us here. See, in the first century, in this Greco-Roman world, it was incredibly common for there to be religious charlatans. I'll call them con-men, swindlers, false teachers, false prophets, that would roam the countryside and they'd go from town to town and

they would tell people something that they wanted to hear in order to gain benefit for themselves. So, they'd go preach something that was pleasing and they'd either make a profit or gain personal favors. This was incredibly common at this time. And I think it's very clear that part of what was happening is these opposers of Paul were coming alongside these new young believers and they were saying, "Hey, Paul was one of those charlatans. Paul was a fake. And you, you've been duped." And in response to that, Paul walks through some of the accusations they made, and he named six attributes of false religion, false ministry, and in naming them and refuting them, he tells us a little bit about what his ministry was like, what his manner of life was like among the Thessalonians. He says first *their message did not come from error*. In other words, they weren't confused. They weren't incorrect. They weren't saying the wrong things. What they said was true. It was right. It was aligned with reality. You can count on it. Their ministry was not marked by error; it was marked by truth.

Second, he says their ministry *didn't come from impurity*. Impurity refers to their motives. They didn't have impure motives as they came among the Thessalonians. They didn't have ulterior motives. They ultimately were seeking something different than purely just proclaiming the truth. They were seeking to honor God and to honor God alone. That's what their ministry was all about.

He continued. He said their message *didn't come from deceit* or *flattery*. I'm going to kind of pair those together. Flattery is really just a form of deceit, right? If I'm flattering someone, I'm kind of buttering them up. I'm telling them what they want to hear so that I might benefit, so I can kind of trick them into getting something that ultimately, I want. To be deceitful is just to lie, to trick someone. And Paul was not a fraudster. He and his team were not liars. They weren't tricksters. No, they were honest as they went about their ministry. Not flattery, but straight talk.

Not greed, he says. Some people are incredibly motivated by money. Going all the way back to the beginning of time, money has been an incredible motivator for people to do awful things. Paul makes it clear that's not what they were about. "We weren't about money. That wasn't what was driving us. What was driving us was a boldness based in God and the desire to honor Him and Him alone."

And finally, he said, "We didn't *seek glory from men."* They weren't seeking to please people, weren't seeking to garner praise from people. They were seeking to honor God and honor God alone. That is what his ministry was about. Now, it's interesting that as this section ends, Paul adds, in verse 6, "Listen, we could have invoked our title. We are apostles after all. We could have invoked our title in order to overwhelm you or in order to make you believe or go along with what we are saying. But we didn't even do that, even though we could have done that." That wasn't what marked their ministry. They didn't swing their apostolic weight around in order to have success.

Now, as he continues, he's already named these negative things that they were not. But what we're going to see, as we move forward, is he's going to start giving these positive attributes of what their time in Thessalonica was like. Verse 7:

> **But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart**

to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. (Vs. 7-8)

Were you expecting that? When you think of the apostle Paul, I don't know about you, but I sometimes think of this frenetic person. But when he says this word that marked their ministry, he said, **we were gentle among you**. It kind of catches me off guard for a second. And then he gives this image. It's so tender, and so beautiful. He said, "*We were like a nursing mother, a nursing mother with her children*." And one of the things that I love, especially about these epistles, these letters, is that they were written to a definite people. These people knew Paul. And they're reading His words, and if they were not true, they could have just raised their hand and said, "Uh, timeout. We experienced that you were a tyrant, Paul. Gentle? What are you talking about? That's not what you were like at all." But Paul was confident that what he was saying would be received by them because they knew it was true. He was **gentle** among them.

Paul was really a fairly singular individual. He's going place to place, city to city, and just planting churches. And it seems like everywhere he went, that just suddenly there'd be a church, and an elder board, and like three worship teams that would just pop up. And you're like, "How did he do it?" He had this incredible pace, and I sometimes think about his pace so much. But what I love here is that he reminds us that in the midst of all of that frenetic energy, his pastoral heart always shone through. He's a pastor. He loved these people. He cared for these people. He didn't have some kind of drive-through ministry, just kind of dispensing a little truth and then just kind of moving on. No, he entered into their lives. He says they *imparted the gospel*, and we can be sure that they boldly proclaimed the gospel. But he also says he *gave them their very lives*. They offered up their lives to the Thessalonians.

This conviction about ministry, this pastoral concern for it to be up close and personal, is something that we think about a lot here at Lincoln Berean Church as leaders and staff. See, a conviction of ours is that we have to keep striving to find ways for people to come into contact, because ministry is personal. It's one of the reasons that we decided a few years ago, "You know, we have to relaunch something like life groups, because we need to find opportunities, we need to provide a context for people to come into a community with one another and live in a life-on-life way in order to encourage one another to be known." It's incredibly important because ministry is personal; it is intimate.

Paul knew these people. He entered into their lives, imparting to them his very life. You know it's interesting, one of the trends right now in the church world is that people are hiring what they're calling a virtual, discipleship pastor, an online pastor. And part of that is driven by the fact that so many people are choosing to engage in church from a distance. But we've got to let you know that as a staff, we just will never take that step. It's not because we don't understand the strategy, but it's just because our conviction is that ministry has to be face-to-face. Ministry and pastoring and shepherding and loving and caring and ministering to one another has to be life-on-life. Ministry is intimate. Church is personal. Church is intimate. Community is intimate. It requires that we know one another. It requires that we enter into the pain and the struggle with one another and impart our very lives to one another.

Paul and Silas and Timothy offered up their very lives to the Thessalonians. What becomes very clear in this part of the passage, is that Paul's life and his teaching, his proclamation, align perfectly. There was congruence between the two. It wasn't that you heard him say one thing, but then saw him live a different way. No, they were perfectly aligned, living out that which he proclaimed, and, in reminding the Thessalonians of this, he was encouraging them to model the same behavior—to follow in his footsteps as he followed after Christ, even in the midst of persecution, even in the midst of great opposition. He continues in verse 9, telling us more about his time there.

> **For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so *is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.** (Vs. 9-12)

You remember just a moment ago, Paul said they didn't come with a pretext for greed. And all we need to do is look at this little situation here, and this description here, to understand why that accusation was just ludicrous. We know that Paul, everywhere he went, he would set up shop. He was a tentmaker. He'd open up his tent-making business and he'd work all day. I'm sure as he was working alongside other artisans, he would share the truth. I'm sure just as each one of us, wherever we are placed in life, is called to minister right in that place. But as the day drew to a close, the shops would close. Paul would continue, and his ministry would kick into high gear in a relational, personal way, going into people's homes, going to public places, proclaiming the gospel. If there was a synagogue, he would go and proclaim and teach there. Paul worked tirelessly, and there was a method to his madness. There was a reason behind all of it. See, Paul was absolutely adamant that nothing detract from the purity of the gospel. He knew that if he would start to operate a little bit like these religious charlatans, that could be something that would distract, that would maybe deter people from taking up the pure message of the gospel. And so he did everything within his power to not create any obstacles. So, he worked and paid his own way. He did that for their sake. And all of that was aimed at making sure it was the gospel that came through, the gospel that shone through because the gospel has power. The gospel has power!

Here again, in his description, we see his pastoral heart. Earlier he said he was gentle, like a nursing mother. Here he uses a different parental image. He said like a father, **loving**, **imploring**, **exhorting**, **encouraging**, **challenging**. Can you just hear his concern for them, his love for them, the way he cared for them? He was deeply engaged with them, and all of it was driving towards the goal that he names in verse 12: …**so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory**. All of his work among the Thessalonians, all of it, was aimed at helping them know the truth, and helping them walk in a manner worthy of the God who called them. To walk worthy, as Paul says, is really just to live in a way that honors God and Jesus Christ who He sent. Throughout the New Testament, that imagery of **walk** always means, pretty much always means, *to live*. To walk is to live. He's saying, "Live in a manner that is worthy of the God that has called you." To live worthy is really just to live in a way that aligns with the reality we have been brought into. See, Paul says, "You have been made a citizen of the kingdom of God, and so, live as a citizen. You've been brought into the glory of God, so live out, walk out that glorious life that you've been brought into." What would that look like on a day-to-

day basis? Well, it would look a lot like what Paul is urging them to continue in here, just to walk in a way that is aligned with what we have been set apart for. We've been set apart for the gospel. We have been people that have been granted entrance into the kingdom of God, and so now we are to live that out. And that is precisely what Paul is encouraging them to continue doing, because they have been doing it, and it has been encouraging to his pastor's heart.

As we make a turn to verse 13, there is a bit of a shift in the text, and so let me just sum up where we've been. Paul and Silas and Timothy, they modeled gospel ministry, these marks of ministry during their time in Thessalonica. And they were reminding the Thessalonians of it in order to encourage them, in order to build up their hope and help them persevere. Paul demonstrated how his life and his proclamation aligned. He lived in a way that was gentle. He lived in a way that was marked by love and care. And he also demonstrated the truth by his very life, and his deepest hope was that these Thessalonians would hear of this and remember this, and they would be stirred up to continue in like manner. They would continue in imitating him as he imitated Christ. And he was deeply grateful as we're going to learn in verse 13, that they were doing just that. Verse 13:

> **For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.**

He constantly gave thanks to God that those Thessalonians, when they heard the word from Paul and his team, received it as from God. That is really important for us to hear. Paul spoke. Paul acted. Paul proclaimed. But the Thessalonians received it as from God. And when God moves along with someone's action, as Paul spoke, God moved in the hearts of the Thessalonians, and he brings about fruit. He produces a result. It's critical that we see that, actually, as believers. You know, Paul acted. Did he have an intent to act and was he busy in proclaiming the gospel? Absolutely! Did the power lie in Paul's words? Not at all! Power lies in God who moves. It's an important distinction for us.

You know, each week as whoever it is gets up here to preach, I can just tell you we work. We work tirelessly to make sure that we're really arriving at what God said in His Word. So, we study; we think; we craft; we bounce it off people; we consider, and then we go back and edit it. And you know, you just keep pouring over this because you're so intent to proclaim what is true. And this is an interesting text, and I'll just tell you, I was in a wrestling match this week. I'm a little fatigued. It's an interesting text, but as I come up here to speak, (this is true of all of us) I do not trust the work that I put in. My hope is that God moves. We proclaim, but the only thing that is able to bring about any result in the life of any one is that God's Spirit would take those words and He would do something with them that only He can do. Paul spoke, but the key is, the Thessalonians received it as from God. God is so gracious to us. As we come to Him and we seek to honor Him, we seek to walk in a manner worthy. We offer up our little pieces of obedience to Him, and He is so faithful and so good that He takes them, and He multiplies them, and He brings about a result that is only explainable by His power, by His goodness. We act, but it's God who brings the results.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy, they proclaimed and they lived the gospel. They lived it out in front of the Thessalonians, and in turn the Thessalonians received their words, and their lives were being transformed. What they heard, they received, and they received it as from God. And what they

received, they then turned, and were transformed as they began to imitate that which they heard and that which they saw. Verse 14:

> **For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.** (Vs. 14-16)

Your translation may say, "**Wrath is come upon them at last.**" Paul wrote with a heart of thanksgiving, because he was so overjoyed when he heard of the way the Thessalonians were living. These brothers and sisters, that he so dearly loved, were walking in a manner worthy of the gospel, and he wanted to continue to encourage them to continue at it. In the same way that the churches in Judea persevered in the face of opposition, the Thessalonians were now persevering in the face of opposition. They were following in the footsteps of Jesus and the prophets, and Paul himself. You could say they were taking on the family resemblance, suffering for the sake of the gospel, standing tall, standing firm. And Paul was calling them to continue at it, encouraging them, and so thankful, he said, for what you're doing.

But then, as this passage closes, it brings us to an interesting note to end on, because Paul turns his attention to the character of those who oppose the work of God. He described what they're like, those who stand opposed to God. He says they ***are not pleasing God, says they are hostile to all people, says they're intent on preventing salvation from coming to the Gentiles.*** In other words, there are people who are adamantly opposed to what God is doing in the world. There always have been; there always will be. Simply put, there are people who are opposed to God. They hate God and they hate His work. They resist it.

So a question arises for us as we seek to live out the gospel. A question arises for us when we encounter people like that. Are we somewhat justified when we encounter an opposer of God, are we justified in maybe letting them feel a little bit of our vengeance? Maybe let them know, "Hey, you can't do that," and let them feel a little bit of my wrath? Can I kind of unleash my anger on them? But, of course, it's righteous anger, right? Are we justified in acting that way? Well, Paul turns the attention of the Thessalonians to the sense of future hope that we have as believers. The hope we have is that a day is coming when all things will be set right. There is a day coming when all accounts will be paid. See, God sees sin. He's perfectly aware of it. He knows those who oppose Him. He's not ignorant of any of this. He sees it. And we have hope in the fact that there is a judge coming, and that judge is just, and He will judge rightly. And a day will come—it is coming—when all things will be set right. And Paul alludes to the fact that, in some ways, the wrath of God has already started to come upon them. We don't know exactly what that is, but I think one form of it is that, in spite of all of their efforts, the work of God was exploding everywhere. All of their efforts were futile. God was advancing. Wrath has already started to come upon them, but it will come upon them in the last days. God is the judge. That is His job, and He will take care of that. And that should stir up hope for us. Not this joyful glee that, finally they'll get theirs. Not that! But relief…relief, because we long for justice, and God is just. He'll take care of it. That is His job.

We do, however, have a job, don't we? Our job is to represent Christ in the midst of a broken world, even in the face of opposition. So, as we consider this text, as we aim to be people of hope, the question for us is, "What does this mean for us?" And as I sat and wrestled with this text, I became convinced that part of what we are supposed to do with this text is let it serve as a bit of a mirror for us, a mirror where we look at ourselves, and we consider, as we are seeking to walk in a manner worthy, "Are we living lives that align with the truth that we've been called into?"

Throughout this text, Paul called upon the Thessalonians to remember their time together. He did that so that they would continue to walk in a manner worthy of the God who called them into His kingdom and His glory. He wrote them so they'd be strengthened, they'd be fortified to persevere, even when things were difficult, to maintain this God-honoring posture in the world. He reminded them what the true marks of gospel ministry were: ministry grounded in confidence in God and God alone, ministry proclaimed, ministry lived out. That's what he did, and he was encouraging them to do the same.

Now, each one of us in this room—none of us of course are the Apostle Paul—but God has called each one of us to a work of ministry. He's placed us right where He's placed us on purpose. And there is a part of God's work in the world that He has called each one of us to, wherever we are. And so, as we allow God's word to sit and serve as a mirror for us, a question we have to ask, as we go about our lives, is, "Are we representing the gospel well?" When people hear what we say, when they see the way we live, do they hear, and do they see the gospel? Do they see God's grace? Do they see God's goodness? Do they see God's magnificence? Do they see it when things are good? Do they see it when things are bad in our lives? Are we walking in a manner worthy of the One who has called us into His kingdom and His glory? Now if so, what I want to say is, "Way to go. Keep at it." It's exactly what Paul would say. But if there's a little part of you that says, "You know, there is this area…this area where I struggle. What I want to say is, "Just talk with God about that." Consider how you might live out the reality that He has brought you into. He has made you a citizen of His kingdom. So, talk with Him about what it might look like to walk in that truth.

In chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians, Paul said this about the Thessalonians. He said they were gaining a reputation of being a people who honored God with their very lives, and that the word of God was sounding forth from them, spreading everywhere throughout the region. I want to say "Lincoln Berean, let that be true of us." When people meet and know us and interact with us, let us be a people that they say, "Oh, these are people who speak the truth, and their lives reflect the truth." Oh, let that be true of us.

I opened by asking, when we represent Jesus in the world, what is more important? Is it our words or is it our actions, the way that we live? And no one said, "That's a bad question…false dichotomy, Ryan." Because obviously, both are incredibly important, right? We want to be people who proclaim what is true and have lives that align with that truth. Both are incredibly important. But please hear this. Both are important, but neither are where we place our trust. Do you understand that distinction? Both are important, but neither are where we place our trust. See, we as humans have this tendency to hear that and think, "Okay, it's on me. It's on me if someone doesn't become a believer; it's on me…and I've got to bear that burden." But that is not what I'm saying. That is not what Paul is saying. Don't receive that pressure. No! See, we want to be people who walk after

God's own heart, who live in a manner worthy of the gospel. But we don't place our confidence in how we live, and we don't place our confidence in what we say. We place our confidence in God. He is the only One that is able to change lives. He is the only One able to produce fruit. He is the only One that is able to take our small offerings and turn them into something that is good and glorious for Him and for His glory. We act, absolutely, but we don't trust our actions. We place our trust; we place our confidence in God, and God alone. So the pressure is off. The pressure is off, as we seek to live in a manner worthy, worthy of the God who has called us into His kingdom and into His glory. Join me as we pray.

Our Father, we do thank You that You have called us into Your kingdom. You transferred us, You tell us, from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of your beloved Son. So, Father, we ask You to help us. Help us by the power of Your Spirit, to walk in a manner worthy, to live as citizens, not of this world, but of Your kingdom. Help us as we speak the truth. Help us as we live it out. Empower us to do that. By Your Spirit, we pray that all people might come to know who You are, and the goodness of life with You. Through the power of the Spirit, and in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988, 1995
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2023 – Pastor Ryan Harmon. All rights reserved.

lincoln berean

WINTER 2023 // WEEK 2

Life Group Questions

A People of Hope // January 21/22, 2023

The Marks of Gospel Ministry // 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Introduction

This week's passage presents a defense of the ministry of Paul, Silas, and Timothy among the Thessalonians. They respond to accusations about their motives and the effectiveness in their short time of ministry that might be unsettling to the Christians in Thessalonica.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1) **If you could spend a day with one of the original twelve Apostles, who would you spend it with? What would you want to talk about?**

2) **What is the worst bit of advice you have ever received?**

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) What aspect of this week's message made you think *after* you left the church building?

2) What do we learn about God from the defense of their ministry that Paul, Silas, and Timothy give?

3) Discuss some of the specific accusations that were apparently made against the ministry of Paul, Silas, and Timothy (e.g, they were teaching things that were false, they have impure motives, they are doing it for profit, etc.).

   What do these men of God say in response to those accusations?

   How would these responses alleviate the concerns of and encourage the Thessalonians?

4) From what Paul, Silas, and Timothy say in defense of their ministry to the Thessalonian church, what specific ways can we discern between church teachers and leaders who demonstrate godly character and those who do not?

   Do you think there is a danger for Christians to use the gospel or opportunities for Christian service for their own benefit? Explain. Have you ever felt that temptation? (The prayer focus below is an opportunity to talk to God about this).

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Prayer Focus: In your times of prayer this week, take a few moments for the following:

1. Request that God gives you the wisdom to discern good teachers and leaders from bad ones.
2. Ask God that he helps you resist any temptation to use the gospel, your knowledge of the Bible, and your Christian faith for your own benefit or advancement.

Scripture Focus: God serves as both a model for how to minister to people and a contrast to bad leaders. Each day this week carefully and slowly read *Ezekiel 34:1-16*. Notice how God shepherds his people compared to how some of Israel's leaders shepherded the people. You may even want to read this passage alongside *Psalm 23*.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?