

WORK MATTERS

"THE GREAT DIVIDES: WORK AS VOCATION"

1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12

This Week's Core Competency

Giving Away My Life – I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes. Romans 12:1, *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*

We are all familiar with the saying, "It's not *what* you know, it's *who* you know that matters." This slogan refers to the advantage of having key relationships or 'connections' with others in order to achieve a desired end. It is commonplace in virtually every facet of our contemporary culture. That which may be desired is as varied as the many arenas of networking we find all around us. Some people network in hopes of getting a job or promotion. Others network in an effort to get their children into the ideal private school or a parent's alma mater university - especially when their child's 'credentials' fall just outside the margins of acceptability. Many clubs and associations require a recommendation by a present member before you can even receive an application. And at every level of civil government (local, state, national) new entrants into the political arena quickly become aware that if you don't 'play the game,' you won't be in it for long. "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" serves as the primary 'economy' in any/all bureaucracies.

Regardless of the setting, 'networking' is here to stay. And the forming and maintaining of key relationships with people, even if partially to achieve some personal gain, is not in and of itself immoral (although I would suggest that in all healthy relationships, there exists a reasonable measure of reciprocity). And in some situations or environments networking is not only necessary, but good. However, it becomes a problem when our

preoccupation with self-seeking ends serves as our primary motivation for forging relationships with others. After all, the Apostle Paul exhorts us in Philippians that "each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (2:4).

In fact, when viewed through a biblical lens, 'networking' looks decidedly different than it does through the lenses typical of the secular world around us. In fact, it seems the gospel message itself, rooted in divine love, is antithetical to the notion of forging relationships for the sake of personal gain. Rather, it is categorically for the benefit of others. "But God demonstrates his love for us in this: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5:8). In the gospels, Jesus states, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45).

Note Paul's passionate plea to make sure the Thessalonians rightly remembered the nature of his time with them. "You know we lived among you for your sake" (1Th 1:5b) "not...from...impure motives" (2:3). "We never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed - God is our witness" (1Th 2:5). "But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (vv. 7-8a). We (Paul, Silas and Timothy) were "holy, righteous and blameless" among you (v. 10). "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory" (vv. 11-12). Paul's motivation for 'networking' with them is found in

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his response to *their* response to the gospel. "We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it..." (v 13a). Their gain, at his expense, was his joy.

Paul celebrates that the Thessalonians became "imitators" (1:6) of the "brotherly love" he and his fellow missionaries originally extended to them. Yet, he urges them to "do so more and more" (4:10). Meeting this challenge would require a radical paradigm shift in the hearts and minds of a good number of his hearers. Prior to their conversion, developing relationships was primarily a self-seeking means to an end. But the gospel invites them, and all Christians even to this day, to give away their lives for the sake and well-being of others - especially fellow believers/partners in ministry (Jn 13:34; Gal 6:10). Does this describe the heartbeat behind the relationships in which you invest? Perhaps today's text will guide us on how we can be better "imitators" of our brothers Paul, Silas and Timothy.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all of the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Cf., 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (see last week's issue)

6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we

were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

11 We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. 13 And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is good.

14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "now" indicating *transition* in v. 9.
- * Highlight "brotherly love" indicating *subject* in v. 9.
- * Underline "taught by God" in v. 9.
- * Box "yet" indicating a *conjunction* in v. 10.
- * Highlight "to do...and more" in v. 10.
- * Write "and" after "more and more" in v. 10.
- * Draw an arrow from it to "brotherly love" (v. 9).
- * Number each command in v. 11.
- * Circle each occurrence of "so that" indicating *reason* in v. 12.
- * Underline "win the respect" indicating *result* in v. 12.
- * Underline "not be dependent" indicating *result* in v. 12.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What is the main subject of this passage? What does Paul say about it in vv. 9-10?
2. What do you think Paul means to be "taught by God?"
3. In what sense(s) might the Thessalonians have "loved all the brothers throughout Macedonia?"
4. What exhortations/imperative does Paul give in v. 11? Why do you think he picked these three?.
5. Read the essay on pp. 4-5. Identify the socio-political context of 1 Thessalonians. How does that shape your understanding of why Paul used the exhortations found in v. 11?
6. How might the imperatives to "lead a quiet life" and "to mind your own business" contribute to accomplishing the third imperative, "work with your hands?"
7. How might this third imperative help the Thessalonians extend "brotherly love...*more and more*?"
8. How do you see these three imperatives (v. 11) applying to us today?
9. Contrast the personal motivation found in "patronage" relationships vs. that of "brotherly love" relationships, which are to typify Christian fellowship.
10. What positive outcomes did Paul expect to transpire from their obedient response?
11. How do you suspect diligent work and an uncommon love/generosity for fellow believers would "win the respect of outsiders?"
12. **Discussion:** Is Paul calling us to isolate ourselves from social and political arenas of life? Explain.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Paul established the church in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey. This was a strategic Great Commission endeavor. Situated in the very center of the Roman Empire, Thessalonica was the seat of Roman administration for the province of Macedonia. Known as the "mother of Macedonia," it served as Macedonia's capital as well as the geographic, economic and political hub of the entire province. It housed the chief seaport in the province as well - and for good reason! The Egnatian Way, the main route by land from Rome to the East, ran directly through Thessalonica (see Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 3-4, 207-09).

During Paul's stay, "some of the Jews were persuaded" as were "a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women" (Acts 17:4). Unfortunately, his time there is hastened by a mob of rejecting Jews (v. 5ff). A number of months later, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1Th 3:1-5) to check in on this young, impressionable flock. Timothy then returned to Paul - now in Corinth - with great news of their faith, hope and love (1:3-4). In response, Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians with words of encouragement (Ch 1) and a personal defense of his ministry (Ch 2 & 3) followed by some closing exhortations (Ch 4 & 5).

Identifying geographic and historic details of a biblical account (above) is beneficial for those seeking to better understand the original context of a passage. However, there is far more to 'context' than geographic and historic details. Culture, among other contextual facets, plays a huge role in our understanding of *why* a biblical author is communicating *what* it is that he is writing. Likewise, cultural context is essential for us to perceive how the author's original audience was expected to respond. As we come to a better understanding of how they were expected to respond relative to their culture, we can better equip ourselves to understand how we need to respond, to the same revealed truth, relative to our contemporary culture.

Dating back to its very foundations, the Roman Empire was entrenched in a socio-political structure known as *patronage*. As such, this system played a seismic role in Roman-occupied Thessalonica. In fact, it is perhaps the key to unlocking the poignancy of Paul's words found in today's passage. Patronage refers to a relationship between a *patron* and a *client*.

A patron is a member of society whose public influence and financial wealth exceeded that of any of his clients (i.e. supporters). A client would pledge support (i.e. *pietas* or 'dutiful devotion') to a patron relative to the patron's self-seeking *public* interests and ambitions. In turn, the patron would commit to helping his client attain his *personal* interests and ambitions. Favors that a patron could extend to a client varied widely depending on: the influence of the patron, the closeness in relationship between the two and the individual interests and ambitions of his clients. These favors could include: legal representation, political support, providing financial help, brokering business deals and even arranging marriages between families. These 'back-scratch' relationships existed at every level of Roman society from the emperor to local municipalities, forming a highly complex network of social bonds.

So, for the client, what did 'dutiful devotion' look like? For starters, the banner 'have patron, will travel' is appropriate. Integral to a patron's public influence (and agendas) was the perceived support they had from the people; the larger the patron's 'client entourage' the better. And, the more public support a client could offer, the weightier favors they could expect to receive from the patron in return. So rather than living a "quiet life" (v. 11a), a client's persona would be seen by others as an extension of the patron's public persona.

Second, the client would make the patron's "business" (cf. v. 11b) *their* business (think 'concerns' or 'interests' and not just financial 'commerce'). Not only would they attend public speeches, debates, office inductions, etc., but clients would be involved in the interests and ambitions of their patrons. This 'investment' obviously took up a lot of time, leading to a third, conjoined, aspect of a client's *pietas*. If a client's days were filled by shadowing their patron's path to greater prominence *and* through their participation in the patron's business affairs, little time was left to "work with your hands" (v. 11c). After all, any sustenance one needed could just be leveraged through a client's 'patronic' devotion. Yet, this led to an unfortunate outcome. The greater the investment the client made in the public life and affairs of the patron, the more "dependent" (v. 12) they became on their patron's favors and financial handouts. (See Green, 206-13 and Wikipedia articles:

"Patronage" and "Patronage in Ancient Rome.")

Many in Thessalonica came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. And as a whole, the local church was excelling in "brotherly love" (v. 9) - and not toward just "each other" (v. 9) but to "all the brothers throughout Macedonia" (v. 10). For some, however, their pre-conversion way of living (and 'loving') under the umbrella of patronage came with them. They continued to invest in the boisterous affairs of unbelievers within society leading to lapses in their responsibility to carry their own workload. In all likelihood, this patronage mentality was infecting the self-sacrificing expressions of love relationships for which the church was to be known - hence Paul's stronger admonitions to them a short time later (2Th 3:6-15; see Green, 210-12). Regardless, Paul's persuasion required a radical shift in both the 'locale' and expression of relationships. Prior to salvation, there was a preoccupation with benefactor relationships *outside* the church - with the focus being on self-centered gains/returns. However, once saved, Christians are to be preoccupied with relationships *inside* the church for the benefaction (i.e. gain) of others. (See also John 13:34-35; Gal 6:10.)

This was to be accomplished in large measure by investing fruit from one's diligent work ethic into the needs, well-being and Great Commission endeavors of fellow believers. In the book of Colossians, Paul casts a heavenly vision regarding those who live the life of a sacrificial servant: "Whatever you do, work at

it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (3:23-24).

This course of action would have at least two benefits. In reverse order, this new way of living would foster a liberating sense of self-reliance for one's own basic needs through the discipline of diligent work (see also 2Th 3:10-12). By extension, through this exercise of labor, Paul's primary objective - that "brotherly love" (v. 9) is to abound "more and more" (v. 10) - would become a reality. Next, this new way of living (i.e. a life that embodies all three of Paul's exhortations), would actually accomplish, to a God-ordained extent, that which they were previously seeking as a patron's client - namely, the gaining/winning of respect of "outsiders" (v. 12a). When an unbeliever sees us working hard, not simply to provide for our own essential needs but for the selfless benefit of *others*, they can't help but be moved by the sincerity and authenticity of this "brotherly love" that the world knows not of.

Psalm 128:2 states, "You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours." Blessings and prosperity speak of 'overflow.' It is this overflow that affords us the ability to exercise extraordinary love, care and support for our fellow brother and sisters in Christ. As a result, we will win the respect of those on the outside who long for the authentic love relationships we have, through Christ, with us who believe.

The Message of the Passage

Turn from worldly, self-serving endeavors in favor of a diligent work ethic so as to gain the respect of the lost while you extend uncommon love and support to fellow believers.

day **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on our 'second' of our three "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

• Journal your answer to the following *living* question:

–How does God want to change you?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 19 **brotherly love** (Gk - *philadelphia*; lit. "love to the brethren") "Within the Christian community itself the question of fraternal love was of paramount importance since the church was open to people of all social classes and any ethnic background. Both the free and the slave were welcome, while Greeks, Romans, Macedonians, Jews, and barbarians gathered together to share the same cup in the worship of their one Lord. Men and women had equal status, as did citizens and foreigners in this community where common social boundaries were crossed as a fruit of their common salvation (Gal 3:23; Ro 1:16-17; Col 3:11)" (Green, 203). "In the New Testament it is without exception used for the love uniting Christians to one another" (Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, TNTC, 80).

v. 10 **taught by God** "The expressive word "God-taught" (a single word in the Greek) might at first suggest that apostolic ministry was not needed. But the continuous infinitive implies that the Thessalonians did not need anyone to "keep on writing" to them. They had learned the lesson. Would they have been "God-taught" if the apostles had not visited them? The answer is that they would not. Two points follow. God's teaching is mediated: it may come through the Bible or the preacher, or through both. The truth which has been heard or academically received is "driven home to the heart" by the Holy Spirit. Until that is done a hearer is "man taught" (Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 99-100).

v. 10 **all Macedonia** "The thought is that the Thessalonians showed hospitality to believers from other parts of Macedonia who traveled through the city (Ro 16:1-2), or perhaps they gave economic support to the Christian mission (Php 4:14-16). On the other hand, they may have offered financial aid to those Christians who were in need (2Co 8:1-5), or perhaps the manner they expressed this love was a combination of the three" (Green, 206).

v. 11 **ambition** "In the classics, [*philotimeomai*] meant 'to be ambitious,' but in later Greek, came to signify 'to strive eagerly,' 'to seek restlessly,' and signified a wholehearted and energetic pursuit of the object. But, whether we understand it as 'make it your ambition to be unambitious' or 'seek restlessly to be still,' it makes a colorful statement" (Morris, 81).

v. 11 **quiet life/own business** "Philo and others contrast the "quiet" life with the public life, while Philo even observes that being "quiet" is a mark of nobility. " 'To mind your own business' was the exact opposite of "participating in public affairs (Gk. *prassein ta koina*). We can safely assume that the apostle is calling believers to stay out of public/political affairs" (Green, 210). "The expressions "to live quietly" and "to tend to your own affairs" go together and have unmistakable political connotations (Hock, *Social Context*, 46f)" (Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC, 162).

v. 11 **work/hands** "Although the eschatological expectation concerning the coming of the Lord was vivid in this church, Paul does not link his thought about the day of the Lord with the question of labor, neither in this passage nor in 2Th 3:6-15. This passage, like 2Th 3:6-15, demonstrates that the apostle was opposed to the economic and social dependence that characterized the institution of patronage" (Green, 208). "The counterpoint to patronage was labor" (210). "Given that we have evidence of a problem of idleness (5:14 and 2Th 3:6-10), it seems more reasonable to believe that Paul was addressing an actual situation in the community at Thessalonica" (Wanamaker, 163).

v. 12 While the NIV [(c)1984] indicates a paragraph break at this point, the thought of v. 11 is a continuation of the previous argument ["brotherly love" - vv. 9-10], as signaled by the word "and" at the head of the verse (left untranslated in the NIV [but translated as such in the NIV [(c)2011]])" (Green, 209).

v. 12 **outsiders** "Christians should work and conduct themselves in the community in such a way that they received the "respect: and not the censure of "outsiders" (cf. 1Pe2:11-17; Tit 2:4-10; 3:1-2). They should be regarded as excellent members of the surrounding society, with their conduct being a key element of their testimony (1Ti 3:7).

v. 12 **nobody** "The literal rendering of the last clause is "and have need of nobody (or nothing)." The Greek (*medenos*) is ambiguous, as it is impossible to tell whether it is masculine or neuter. If it is masculine, the readers were being warned against being parasites; if is neuter, it picks up the thought of working with their hands and so advocates financial independence. The latter is slightly preferable" (Ward, 102)

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

My mother-in-law and a group of other retired ladies are the perfect example of our passage today. Several years ago they started a knitting club at church. At first the group met just to work on projects, have lunch and visit but after awhile the Lord laid a ministry on their hearts. They began to knit beautiful prayer shawls. Each time they heard of someone who was ill or was going through a difficult time, they would begin to pray and as they prayed, they began to knit a shawl specifically for that person. With each stitch, the person and their need was covered in prayer. When they delivered the completed shawl, they prayed for the person. It wasn't long before requests were coming in from many places. Their small group grew to a large one. Only the Lord knows how many people in Arlington and Fort Worth have been comforted by the unique prayer shawls. This group just quietly loves and prays and works. The work we do should draw others to the Lord. When it is done in love, it usually does. How can the work you do in parenting, around the house, at your place of employment, in your volunteerism reflect the love of God to others. As believers we have an opportunity each moment of each day to give our lives away to help with God's work. I'm praying that we do it well this week.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

1. What does Paul say the church at Thessalonica is doing well in verses 9-10?
2. How does your daily life win the respect of others?

What Do You Think

1. How would you rate yourself on loving others?
2. Do you think your life and the way you do things wins the respect of others?

What R U Going To Do

I think about your attitude in the things you do. Make a list of your activities and place a smiling face next to those you do in love. Put a frowning face next to the ones you do with a bad attitude. Ask God to help you do all in love!

Core Comp

Giving Away my Life - I give away my life to help with God's work.

Memory Verse

Matthew 5:15 - Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.
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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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