



July 31, 2011 - 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The Impact of a Good Role Model Pastor Larry Adams

If you have your Bibles today, I'd like you to turn with me if you would to 1 Thessalonians Chapter 2. We are continuing on in our study today of "Staying Strong and Living Ready." Actually, today I want to send a special greeting to all the folks down at the Antioch campus. I was supposed to be "live" down there today with them, and you were going to have a broadcast back here today so you could see what they're seeing every week. We had some technical difficulties with that. Our center screen is not working today, so we had to make some last-minute changes this morning. So all of you folks down there who prefer probably watching on the screen anyway, I want you to know we really miss being with you, and we will set up a time very, very soon, Lord willing, to get down there and to spent some time.

God's doing some very exciting things at our Antioch campus. Each week more than 200 people are meeting there. They are impacting the community for Christ, and it's an exciting place to be. We are one church in two locations. Right now, we're meeting here Brentwood and also in Antioch, so I want to give a special greeting to all the folks there. We look forward to seeing you very soon.

You know, this opening chapter here in 1 Thessalonians has been pretty impacting, and Chapter 2 is no less so. This is a very personal letter that Paul is writing to a group of people he cared for very deeply. It's sort of a chapter in Chapter 2 where you're reading between the lines to see the real impact because what were studying about in 1 Thessalonians is how does a church founded by Paul and his companions -- they have probably as little as three weeks to invest in them, they have no established leadership, no Bibles, no track record, no examples to go by other than what they've seen in those three weeks, and yet they go on to be one of the most vibrant Christian churches in the Roman Empire. The question is: How in the world does that happen? Well, we've been learning some of those ways in Chapter 1.

Now in Chapter 2 we're going to see one of the more significant ones; it was the impact of the life that Paul and his companions had upon others. It's the impact of a good role model. And this is the way Paul opens Chapter 2 with them. Notice the number of times he says to them, "You know," "You know," "You know," or "You are witnesses":

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ²We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. ³For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.

⁴On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness. ⁶We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you have become so dear to us. ⁹Surely you remember, brothers, 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.

¹⁰You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹For 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.

Let's pray for a moment.

Father, it is important for all of us to know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is so real and so transforming that there are actually people who live it out faithfully, consistently, powerful, in public and in private, in good times and in bad, through blessings and through trials. I want to thank you for Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, and others who in as little as three weeks had lived such an example before a group of new believers that they were unwavering in their commitment to Christ because they saw a good role model. I pray, God, that you will put such people in our lives, and we will be such people in the lives of others. Thank you, God, for what you show us today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Marvin Olasky is an editor of a magazine I read quite a bit called *WORLD Magazine*. In an article he wrote called "Rising From a Fall," he was telling the story about Timothy Dalrymple, who today is a 34-year-old editor of pathos.com. When Timothy Dalrymple was in college at Stanford, he was the NCAA's top-ranked gymnast until he fell and broke his neck ending his career. "But in God's providence," as this article went on to say, "that disaster opened up opportunities for him to deepen his faith and also earned a PhD from Harvard University."

While lying on his back looking up at the ceiling, Timothy had plenty of time to think. He said "Even as a child I had philosophical bent, and I spent a lot of time thinking about all sorts of ultimate questions, especially the question of whether there is some sort of existence beyond death. I don't know which one terrified me more," he said, "that there would be some existence or that there wouldn't be some existence." Yet when they asked Timothy what helped him to grow in his faith, he said his philosophical questions gave way to a personal relationship and a powerful example. That's what convinced him that Jesus was real. "The example of my father," Dalrymple said, "Not only a pastor but a genuinely loving, faithful, righteous person. I saw in his life something undeniable and true that I could not explain away."

"I saw on his life something undeniably true that I could not explain away." It's the impact of a good role model. Someone who not only preaches the truth, they live it

consistently, faithfully, and for all to see. It's what helped make the difference in the people of the church of Thessalonica, and it's what can help make the difference in us and in others as well. We have been learning about staying strong and living ready from a group of people who did it well. The Thessalonians lived as they did in part due to the power of a good example.

You remember, Paul and his companions founded this church in A.D. 49 on their second missionary journey. After a short time, Paul was forced to leave. When he wrote back and wondered how they were getting along, the prospect of them surviving much less thriving was pretty small, and yet Paul was overwhelmed with gratitude when he learned how well they were doing. In fact they were becoming models everywhere. When Paul wrote to them, he encouraged them, "Stay strong, live ready for the Lord's return." In this letter of 1 Thessalonians we learn some of the reasons for the church's strength and vibrancy, the same things that can be a strength and give vibrancy to every single Christian who practices them. One of the reasons this church stayed so strong and vibrant was the example they had seen in Paul, Silas, and Timothy: people who not only preached the truth, they lived it. And as it says in our outline, if you have downloaded or if you have a copy you picked up, people can stay strong and live ready when they're given a good role model.

So what did Paul and the others model? Well, first of all they modeled the life of personal integrity. They were a model of demonstrated love, and they were a model of godly living. Paul was a model of personal integrity. Here's what he wrote to them in Chapter 2 verse 1:

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ²We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. ³For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness. ⁶We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

Author John Trent in his book *The Hidden Value of a Man*, in an article I was reading this last week at a website I use called preachingtoday.com, in that book he was telling about when he was a young man he led a Young Life boys youth group. He said, "I did my best to round up kids who really needed to hear the gospel, and I'd take them to summer camp. Not all the kids went with the purest motivation. Not all of whom wanted to learn about Jesus, but they were willing to go to camp. A kid, Mark, that I took one year was one of those kids.

Bob Mitchell was the main speaker that week. He called most of the shots including when meals would be served, and so Mitch was always talking to the cook, coordinating the schedule. The cook loved her work, but it was exhausting. She always looked tired, but whenever she talked to Mitch he would get up, give her his chair, and let her rest while they discussed the meal plans together. Nobody noticed Mitch doing this except this young boy, Mark, that I had taken to camp. John Trent said "Mark hadn't come to

camp to hear about Jesus, but when he saw Jesus' love lived out in that simple act of kindness by the camp speaker, he decided he wanted to listen to what Mitchell might have to say in this meetings. So he started going in to listen to him preach. Later that week Mark asked Jesus to be his Savior.

When John Trent later asked Mark what made the difference, Mark said, "It wasn't because of messages but because of the love I saw in Mitch." And listen to this. This is a quote: "If that's what it means to be a Christian," Mark said, "I want to be one."

You know, too often in many of our lives there is a contradiction between the message we preach and the life we live. While none of us live like Jesus completely yet, there can and must be a sense of integrity between the message and the messenger. When the integrity of the messenger matches the integrity of the message, then the message becomes believable. That was the power behind Paul's example to the Thessalonians: it was full of integrity in word and deed. Paul reminded them in Chapter 1 verse 5, "You know how we lived among you for your sake." Now why would Paul make that statement and then repeat it again and again? "You know." "You know." "You are witnesses." "You know." "You saw." Why would he say that so many times? Because Paul and his message had a lot of enemies.

Some followed Paul around wherever he went. Remember when he got chased out of Philippi? They followed him from village to village until they discovered he had been a Thessalonian, and they began spreading lies and rumors to undermine Paul's credibility amongst the people. The church was under attack. After Paul left Thessalonica, people came in and spread these rumors that sounded something like this: "Paul can't be trusted. He has false motives. He pretends to care about you, but all he wants is your money. He must've gotten it which is why he left so quickly. He is a smooth-tongued, flattering liar who's using you in the name of God to pad his own pockets." That was the nature behind the rumors that were being spread.

When Paul writes to them he reminds them, "You know how we lived among you." In other words, "The example of our lives needs no further defense." "You know, brothers," verse 1, "that our visit to you was not a failure."

That phrase "not a failure" is really an interesting one. "Not a failure" in the sense that "it was not void of content," "it was not bankrupt." "Our visit to you was full of content, full of reality, full of integrity." That's the idea. In other words, "You believed because you saw in us and heard through us a message that was believable. And by the way," he goes on to say, "if we're doing this for our own gain, we're not very good at it. As you know, we suffered for this message in Philippi. We've suffered in other places for it, and when we came to Thessalonica, you remember, there was strong opposition but we dared to preach this word you even though we knew it may cost us our lives. We did make an appeal to you," verse 3, "for the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel." In other words, "It was for your benefit and you saw that. We took all the risks so that you could hear the truth. There was no error in what we said. There was no false motive. We didn't trick you or

deceive you. We never asked anything of you. We were aboveboard, upfront, honest in motive and action, and you all know that to be true,” which is why he said in verse 4, “On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.”

People, I’ll will be honest with you, I cannot think of a phrase I would rather have said of me at the end of my life than what Paul just said right there, “We were men approved by God.” You can’t get any higher endorsement than that as a man or a woman. The phrase literally means “an ongoing proof.” In other words, “It was true when you first saw it. It is true now, and we’ve been approved by God to be consistent in the future.” Wow. It refers to all the tests and the trials from his conversion in Damascus to his beatings and imprisonments in Philippi. “All these tests and trials were what God was using to test and approve us to be worthy of preaching the gospel. God was testing our integrity, our faith, and our commitment, and he approved us. He saw in our lives a consistency in the midst of hardship, and so he entrusted us with a message in order to be faithful. We were never out to please you or anyone else. We were only out to please God. He’s our witness, and he’s the one who tests our heart. God tested and approved us. He found us to be real, so he entrusted us with a message that’s real,” which is why Paul could say so confidently in verse 5, “You know -- you know we never used flattery nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed. God is our witness.”

You know, I can’t help but read things like that and ask God, “Am I a man approved by you? All the trials, all the tests, the things that have happened in my life, those are all for a purpose. You’re testing us to determine if we are worthy to be entrusted with a message this important.” If the message only works in fair weather, then it’s not gonna be a message that will be believed, but if you’ve endured these tests and remained faithful, God said, “I’m gonna entrust you with a message that’s faithful.”

Many people who reject the message do so because of the contradictions they see in the messengers. That’s true in a marriage, in a family, in the workplace, and in the church. When the message and the life of the messenger don’t match, the message becomes unbelievable. You can’t preach truth and live a lie and have anyone believe the truth. You can’t preach holiness and live in sin, public or secret, and have anyone believe in holiness. You can’t say, “Just say No,” while everyone, including your children, knows you just say “Yes” and expect that they’re gonna believe that “No” is a believable message because it lacks integrity.

You remember in Proverbs 11 verse 3, “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.” That’s why when Titus was taking over as one of the young leaders of the church on the island of Crete, a very strategic location, he had his hands full. This was not an easy assignment.

Paul wrote to Titus in that great letter and said to Titus in Chapter 2 verse 7, “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.”

“Timothy, I know you’re young, and I know it’s a tough assignment, and you’re going to be their primary teacher. So what I’m telling you is live it or nobody will believe it.”

Paul, Silas, and Timothy had given the Thessalonians a priceless gift, the gift of seeing lives of faith lived out with integrity. The Thessalonians stayed strong and lived ready because they have a good role model that they could believe and follow. It's one of the reasons I love to read the Word and get to know these guys in here. They're my heroes too. They're my role models because they're always pointing me to Jesus the ultimate role model. If you're a Christian today, do you understand the importance of this? Without excuse, you and I are role models for everyone who's watching. If we are good role models, the power of the gospel will be unleashed.

Not only personal integrity, but Paul was a model of demonstrated love. He said in verse 6:

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you have become so dear to us. ⁹Surely you remember, brothers, 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.

This last week, at that same website, I was reading an article from a book called *The Power of a Mother's Touch* written by Elisa Morgan. She apparently is an artist and an author, telling about how one day on one trip to the grocery store she saw the power of demonstrated love. She said:

I was in line at a grocery checkout. A few feet in front of me was a mother who guided her toddler ahead of her, anchored her baby on her hip, elbowed her checkbook open to pay the clerk. In what seemed like one single gesture, she retrieved her toddler's hand from the candy rack, tore the check from her book, offered it to the clerk while placing a comforting smooch atop her baby's head. The baby drooled down the mother's shoulder, the toddler clamp gripped on his mother's leg, and she wrapped her arms around both of them while waiting for her payment to be processed.

Only you who are moms would be able understand how in the world one person can do all that in that moment.

As I wheeled my cart to my car, I noticed another woman with her kindergarten-age son rushing into the store I was exiting. Suddenly she stopped, glanced down at her child, reached in her pocket, brought out a wadded Kleenex. Moistening with her tongue, she swabbed it about his dirty face. He resisted but only briefly. Satisfied with her work in his appearance, she stuffed the tissue back in her pocket, took up his waiting hand, and they marched together into the store.

As I approached my car, I noticed a woman and her teenage daughter chatting in an animated fashion. Hands flew. It wasn't an argument exactly, more a debate. The daughter, almost 6 inches taller than her mother, inclined her head downward. The mother rolled her eyes and patted her daughter's back. And as they reached the car, the mother tossed the daughter the car keys and watched

her daughter's face break into shock.

In each of these cases it wasn't the words, it was the actions I saw that demonstrated love, the caring love of a mom. And interestingly in that book, Elisa Morgan said, "Writing to the Thessalonians about his commitment to lead them with both lessons in life, Paul describes his posture as being like a mother caring for her little children. He gave his followers an example that were words with love and truth with touch."

The things that impressed the Thessalonians the most apparently was that Paul didn't just tell them about God's love, he showed it to them. He said to them, "As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children."

Paul said, "We didn't ask you to take care of us when we were among you, we came and cared for you like a mother does." The word "mother" there is literally the word "nurse," or it's the idea of a nursing mom. That's very important because the word "gentle" goes with it. The word "gentle" in this case means "mild." You put that phrase together, and it sounds something like this, "We were like a nursing mom who gently and patiently handles a fussy infant."

Now, when an infant won't feed and they're fussy and everything else, moms don't slap them around and chew them out. You watch them. They become more patient, more gentle, and more loving. Paul said, "That's the way we were among you. We were like a nursing mom with a fussy child." "We loved you so much," he said in verse 8. An unusual word for "loved." It's a form of agape, but it's an interesting form. It has to do with affection. This is when you feel. "Affectionately desirous" is the term. And affection so strong it causes you to desire to be with them even if it means inconvenience or sacrifice.

We love our little grandson. It's a joy to be around him, but we are getting a reminder of what having little kids was like 30 years ago. They're not always convenient, are they? You don't always get to do what you want to do in the day because there's always something you have to attend to. Paul said, "We loved you so much we were affectionately desirous of you that we wanted to be with you even though it was inconvenient and sometimes sacrificial. We were delighted to share with you, willing to have imparted to you," he said. "We were delighted to do this. It was no burden. We were glad to do for you all that we could."

When you watch a mom, it's pretty amazing. If anyone else made those demands on her, even at times her husband, she wouldn't put up with it. But they are delighted to do it for their children. Paul said, "That's the way we were with you, and you know it. You saw it. So much so that we shared with you not only the gospel of God," here it comes, "but our lives as well."

You want your family to believe the gospel is real? Then give your life along with the message. You want people at work to believe it's real? You want you neighbors to believe it's real? Words alone will not do it.

Paul said, “We didn’t just give you a message, we gave you our lives. We gladly put our lives and your interest ahead of our own the way a mother does for her children.” You remember verse 9? “Surely you remember, brothers, 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.”

Paul said, “As apostles we could have been a burden. We could have been like other leaders who come through town who demand the best hotel and you feed us and take care of us and, by the way, pay us a decent salary and meet all of our needs. Not only does our significance and position demand that, but the rules of hospitality of the first century demand that, but we didn’t do that for you. When we came we paid our own way. More than that, we worked night and day. We were always available to meet with you. When you had needs we were there. We prayed for you. We encouraged you. We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.” And the people saw that example, and they remembered it.

It’s genuine love demonstrated that helps people to believe that the message of love in the gospel is believable. And it was that genuine love that was modeled to them that caused the Thessalonians to love others, even their enemies as we are going to see later on in 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4. They became known throughout Macedonia and Achaia and the region because of their love for others. Where had they learned that? They learned it in Paul and his companions who was gentle among them like a mother is with her own children. When the love of God proclaimed in the gospel is demonstrated by people who preach the gospel, the gospel becomes real.

I was reading this article this week by Jim Cymbala. Jim is the pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, a very dynamic, powerful church in New York. He wrote this article for *Leadership Magazine* a few years ago. It was called “Keeping Connected to Spiritual Power.” Listen to this -- now, this is a very prominent pastor who deals with all kinds of hurting people all the time.

One Sunday in our church service, a woman who sings in our choir, the famous Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, a former drug addict with the HIV virus, told the story of how she came to Christ. She described in raw detail the horrors of her former life. A street person named David stood in the back listening closely.

The meeting ended. I was exhausted. I had been giving and giving, and I had just started to unwind when I saw David coming my way. “I am so tired,” I thought. “Now this guy is going to hit me up for money.” When David got close, the smell took my breath away, the mixture of urine, sweat, garbage, and alcohol. After a few words, I reached into my pocket, pulled out a couple dollars for him. I’m sure my posture communicated, “Here’s some money, now get out of here.”

David looked at me intently, put his finger in my face and said, “Look, I don’t want your money. I’m gonna die out there. I want the Jesus this girl was talking about.”

I paused and then looked up and closed my eyes and I said, “God, forgive me.”

For a few moments I stood there with my eyes closed feeling soiled and cheap, and then a change came over me. I began to feel David's pain. I began to see him as a person, someone Jesus loved and who had brought to church that day. I spread out my arms to him, and we embraced. Holding his head to my chest, I kept squeezing him and telling him about life and about Christ. But it wasn't just words, I felt them. I loved him. That smell, I don't know how to explain it. It almost made me sick before, but it became beautiful to me. I reveled in what had been repulsive. I felt for him what Paul felt for the Thessalonians. God put that kind of love in me. The secret to Paul's ministry was what I felt that night, that divine love became a supernatural power.

Listen to this:

The minute my attitude changed, David knew it. He responded to that love and allowed me to minister to him, and the gospel broke through to David that night.

What did Paul say, "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, because you have become so dear to us."

You know, it's been well said many times, "People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Paul said, "You know how we lived among you, like a mother caring for her little children." The Thessalonians stayed strong and lived ready even in the face of severe suffering because they knew God loved them and they knew it because Paul had shown it to them.

Not only personal integrity and demonstrated love, but Paul was a model of godly living. Verse 10:

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹For 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.

Have you ever heard of Shannon Ethridge? You may remember her by the time I get through with this story. On that same website I was reading an article Kevin Jackson had published on our Christian on-line website an article called "Christian Author Carries Mantle of the Woman She Killed." Attention-getting article. Here's what it said:

When Shannon Ethridge was just 16 years old, an act of forgiveness and love changed her life forever. While driving to her high school one day, Ethridge ran over Marjorie Jarstfer, a woman who was riding her bicycle along a country road. Marjorie died as a result. And Ethridge, who was found completely at fault by authorities, was consumed by intense guilt. She contemplated suicide several times, but she never took her life because of the healing response of one very godly man. It was Marjorie's husband, Gary. Gary forgave the 16-year-old and asked the attorney to drop all charges against her saving her from a probable

guilty verdict. Instead he simply asked that Ethridge continue on in the godly footsteps his wife had taken. In other words, “I want you to learn about my wife’s godly example, and I’m passing that legacy on to you. You need to learn of it and you need to live it. Her life for yours. You can’t let this ruin your life. God wants to strengthen you through this. In fact, I’m passing Marjorie’s legacy on to you, a legacy of godliness.”

Gary’s act of forgiveness showed Ethridge the amazing love of God, and today Ethridge is the best selling author of *Every Girl’s Battle* and *Every Woman’s Battle*, and her recent book *Completely His: Loving Jesus Without Limits* is helping women overcome guilt-ridden wounded lives. Shannon Ethridge had been impacted by a godly life.

You know the word “godly” in the scriptures, although it doesn’t appear here in Chapter 2, this is a description of a godly life. The word “godly” in the scriptures is a compound word; it’s two words put together. “Well” “devout” is what godly means. In other words, it means “very God-like in character and conduct.” Godly examples are so powerful because they’re so much like God. Godly examples are rare, but when you see one, it impacts you.

That’s what Paul and his companions had given to the Thessalonians, a model of godly living. Paul had lived such a godly life among them that he could now call the Thessalonians and God as his witness. Now, think about that. He said, “You are witness, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.” He’s saying to the Thessalonians, “We lived among you a God-like life.” Can you imagine calling God to witness whether or not you are living like him! Paul said he could do that. Amazing. I’m not exalting these people to God-like status, I’m just telling ya, these guys, despite their faults, were living it. It was real, and the Thessalonians could see it.

“You saw how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you.” These words are significant. “Holy” is a form of the word of holy that means “religiously right, not polluted, the real deal.” In other words, “Any religious context of demonstrating our faith, you saw that we were really set apart in living like God. How righteous we were among you.” A state of being right and living right, but it implies according to God’s standards, “Not my idea of right or your idea of right. What I’m telling you, what you saw is God’s idea of what right living looks like. And we were blameless among you,” which means that no matter what accusations are made by others, they proved to be false because they’re not true. “God knows it and so do you.”

Then I find it interesting, these powerful attributes that he is living out before their eyes, then he said, “We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,” implying what? Exactly what it’s saying. A father’s primary role is to be a model of godliness to his own family, to live a God-like life in front of the eyes of his family. A father is to teach, guide, protect, and model the life of God to his family. Paul said, “I lived that life among you, encouraging, comforting, and urging you.”

that grew up with a strong commitment to Christ. The son's name was David Kraft, and his father was a pastor, a godly pastor in the South Bay. Maybe some of you have heard Pastor Kraft speak. David Kraft grew up with a father who constantly remembered God's faithfulness in the past so that David might trust in God in all of his tomorrows. David grew up in love with Jesus, and he felt the call of God into the pastoral ministry. He went to Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary. David was a big, athletic young man. At the age of 32 he was 6'2" and weighed 200 lbs. He worked with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

At age 32 he was diagnosed with cancer, racked his body, and over a period of time he dropped to 80 lbs. When he was about ready to pass from this life into eternity, he asked his father to come into his hospital room. Lying there in bed he looked up and said, "Dad, do you remember when I was a little boy, how you used to just hold me in your arms close to your chest?"

David's father nodded.

And then David said, "Do you think, dad, you could do that one more time, one last time?"

Again his father nodded and he bent down to pick up his 32-year-old, 6'2, 80 lb son as best he could. He held him close to his chest, and the son's face was right next to his father's face. They were eyeball to eyeball, and tears were racing down both their cheeks. In that moment, David simply said to his father, "Thank you. Thank you for building the kind of character into my life that can enable me to face a moment even like this."

That's what Paul, Silas, and Timothy had done for the people of Thessalonica. They had come into that place and founded a church, and they held those people close to their chest. They had given them a good role model and what it means to stay strong and to live ready even in the face of persecution, a role model they could believe in that helped them embrace a God they could believe in.

Arnold Toynbee once said, "Most people have not rejected Jesus but only a caricature of him. They've never seen the real Jesus." God is calling us to be that for each other, the real Jesus. He's calling us to be that for our spouses, our families, our world, and our church. People who are good role models of what it means to believe the gospel and people who live it are models to others of personal integrity, demonstrated love, and a godly life.

People, I don't know what's coming in all of our lives, but testing will be a part of it. Could there be anybody who would say of my life and of your life, "Thank you for giving me an example that helps me to face a moment like this."

Father, I want to thank you today for the challenge of this. These letters are so personal. Sometimes it feels as though we are intruding into someone's personal mail. And yet, God, you have given us this word that we might know and understand that there really are people who live strong, stay strong, and live ready. These aren't exceptional people, they had exceptional faith for a reason. Thank you for teaching

us some of those reasons because those things are available to all of us. And, God, as you look at our lives today, would you find us approved to be entrusted with the transforming message of the gospel? Thank you for forgiving us for all of our past mistakes and even all of our future ones. For what I'm asking today, God, is that you would help me, you would help us, to be people that you would approve of and that we would be good examples. We thank you, God, for the challenge and the encouragement of it. In Jesus' name, Amen.