

Week 2

Day 1

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12** below **three times** and then follow the instructions that follow:

For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our visit with you was not without result. On the contrary, after we had previously suffered and were treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, we were emboldened by our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition. For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive. Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please people, but rather God, who examines our hearts. For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives—God is our witness— and we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others. Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nurse nurtures her own children. We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers and sisters. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God's gospel to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. As you know, like a father with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to live worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

1. Circle any words that seem important to you in this passage.
2. Put squares around the verbs (action words) in this passage.
3. Write down three questions that you have after reading this passage:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
4. What encourages you from this passage?
5. What challenges you from this passage?
6. What would you say is the main idea of this passage?
7. Choose a verse or group of verses that you will memorize this week. Write that verse or those verses below:

Day 2

I love a good courtroom drama. I still remember being a Junior at Dyersburg High School when we were compelled to read "To Kill a Mockingbird." As the story of attorney Atticus Finch, his family, and his attempt to defend an African-American man in a segregated South unfolds, the tension is evident as you read. A main theme throughout the book is that people are often unfairly and unjustly accused of being people that they aren't or doing things that they didn't do.

1. Remember a time when you felt that you were unjustly criticized or accused. What emotions did you experience in those moments? Why do you think you felt that way?

All of us have been in the cross-hairs of criticism. It may have come from a spouse, a parent, an adult child, or another family member — all of which can be incredibly painful. It may have come in the form of gossip from fellow employees, or the biting comments of your supervisor. It may have come from those you were trying to serve spiritually—a small group, a class you taught, a ministry where you volunteered.

When we find ourselves with a bull's-eye pinned to our backs, it's hard to know how to respond. Whatever we say can sound defensive. In this passage we're given some real help in how to respond to criticism, gossip, and slander. This is Paul's response to his own critics.

Paul writes 13 New Testament books and plays a central role in the planting of churches in the first century. But no one is immune to criticism and slander. In a number of passages we find Paul responding to these attacks. That's what Paul is doing in chapters 2 and 3 of this letter.

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12** and then answer the following questions:

2. What emotion do you think Paul is feeling when he is writing this portion of the letter?

3. How does your understanding of his emotion change how you read this section?

4. List at least four ways that Paul defends himself and his ministry to the church of the Thessalonians.

Paul Tripp says that all of us are born with an inner defense attorney. That we naturally go on the defensive when being attacked.

5. When is it beneficial to unleash our inner defense attorney? When is it detrimental to unleash our inner defense attorney?

6. Write down one truth you learned from today's lesson.

Day 3

In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul's defense attorney walks into the courtroom to defend his ministry. He begins by making two general observations:

1) The mission was successful. ***Our visit to you was not without result (vs. 1)***

Whatever else is said, the reality is that a church has been established in Thessalonica. The mission had been successful.

2) The mission involved great risk. Prior to coming to Thessalonica, Paul had been in the city of Philippi, in this same region. In Philippi, Paul and his associate Silas had been stripped, savagely beaten with rods, and held in prison in stocks. It was extremely painful, insulting, humiliating. They came to Thessalonica with their eyes open; they knew the risks. Nevertheless, they came and "dared" to communicate the gospel despite strong opposition. They spoke freely, openly, fearlessly. But this visit was no different than others. These missionary trips were extremely dangerous; they weren't done for selfish purposes.

After stating these two observations, in verse 3 Paul begins a more formal defense of his ministry. He will emphasize two things: integrity and motivation.

1. What characteristics make someone a person of high integrity? What characteristics make someone a person of low integrity?

2. What person in your life do you most respect for their integrity?

Read **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**.

3. What descriptions in this passage speak to Paul's integrity?

Interestingly, Paul speaks of his integrity in positive and negative ways. Today, we will focus on the negative ways he describes his integrity. He says in this passage that he came to the church of the Thessalonians:

- Without Error
- Without Impurity
- Without Deceit
- Without Flattery
- Without Greed

4. Of the list above, which do you think is most important in the life of someone who is proclaiming Christ? Why?

5. Of the list above, which of the five listed do you have the easiest time avoiding in your own life?

6. Of the list above, which of the five listed do you have the hardest time avoiding in your own life?

7. Write down one truth you learned from today's lesson.

Day 4

Naval officers often refer to the "integrity of the hull." When a submarine comes out of dry dock, the first exercise is called a "sea trial," which takes the submarine to depth in the ocean to test the integrity of the hull. Naval personnel sometimes call this phase a "shakedown cruise" because it measures a vessel's performance and general seaworthiness. If integrity is compromised in anyway, such as a poor weld, the stress from the increased pressure of deep water will inevitably find that weakness.

Paul had himself faced several "sea trials" that proved the integrity of his life.

Read **2 Corinthians 11:23-29**.

1. Rank Paul's five worst predicaments according the way that you would least like to experience them:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

James reminds us in his letter that we should ***"(c)onsider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing," (James 1:2-4, CSB).***

When Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica, he is recounting the way in which he was matured by the trials he experienced among them and the Philippians. He includes in his list of integrity positive traits that he demonstrated in their midst including that he ministered:

- With God's Approval
- With Gentleness
- With Transparency
- With a Willingness to Work
- With a Desire to Challenge

2. Do any of the characteristics surprise you as being part of his defense? Why or why not?

3. Of the list above, which do you think is most important in the life of someone who is proclaiming Christ? Why?

4. Of the list above, which of the five listed do you have the easiest time displaying in your own life?

5. Of the list above, which of the five listed do you have the hardest time displaying in your own life?

One of the most interesting aspects of his defense is that he uses a metaphor of both a nursing mother and a disciplining father.

6. Why do you think Paul used both of those metaphors in his defense?

7. Write down one truth you learned from today's lesson.

Day 5

What motivates you? What is it that gets you out of bed in the morning? What gives you the desire to go forward even when it is hard or frustrating? What motivates you at work? What motivates you at home? What motivates you in your spiritual life?

As part of his defense, Paul describes his motivation. In verse 4 Paul says that he was driven by a desire to please God, not men. Paul isn't playing to the crowds. He is not looking for the applause of others. Again in verse 6, he reminds them that he and his coworkers didn't seek praise from others. Paul wasn't driven by a desire to please people. He was accountable to other believers. But ultimately he knew he was accountable to God. That drove him. That drove what he did. It drove how he served.

1. When is a time in your life when you have done the right thing with the wrong motivation? How do you think wrong motivation impacts that effectiveness and integrity of a good act?

2. How do you evaluate the motivations of your actions in your own life?

3. What area of your spiritual life do you currently have a hard time finding the motivation to follow God?

4. Have you noticed any differences in the level of your motivation during our current situation? If so, where have you been more motivated and where have you been less?

As we finish out the week together, I want us to focus on the lessons we can learn from the way Paul handled criticism of him and his ministry. As we look over his ministry defense again, I see at least a couple of ways that Paul shows us how to handle criticism constructively.

**ASK GOD TO EVALUATE YOU,
YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO HIM,
YOUR METHODS,
AND YOUR MOTIVES.**

Read **Psalm 139:23-24** and **Psalm 51**.

Psalm 139:23-24 show someone asking God to search everything about them - to test who they are and how they are behaving from the inside out. Psalm 51 shows the results of someone (David after being caught in his lies about Bathsheba and Uriah) who realizes his sin.

5. Spend some time asking God to search you and know you. Ask him to show you those ways in your life that are offensive. After that, sit and wait for a few minutes. Write down anything that comes to mind in the space below.

6. Agree with God on those and ask him to give you the strength to overcome through Jesus.

**DON'T LET CRITICISM
PARALYZE YOU.**

Paul doesn't hang it up. He doesn't go home. He completes his second missionary journey. He goes on a third extended journey. The cliché is true: The only way to avoid

criticism is to do nothing. Even when there is a legitimate issue in our lives that we need to address, we may need to press on with the task that God has put in front of us.

Read **Exodus 14:10-18**. This is one of my favorite moments in the Bible. The Egyptians have changed their mind and are now approaching the Israelites on the banks of the Red Sea. Moses is trying to reassure the people after they have criticized his leadership and turns to pray to God. God simply responds to him that he should quit praying and get moving. One of the greatest miracles in the entire Bible happens right after God tells Moses to quit praying. The point he is making is that we cannot be paralyzed by the criticism of others or our own shortcomings. We must keep moving forward in the tasks to which God has called us.

7. When have you been guilty of allowing criticism or failure to prevent you from doing what God has called us to do?

8. Is there an area of your life right now that you need to move forward - an area where you need to quit praying and get moving?

9. Write down one truth that you learned today.