

Gospel Family

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning. Hope you're doing well. My name, as Jesse said, is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here at City Grace. So good to be with you here this morning. As he said, continuing a series that we're doing through the book of 1 Thessalonians.

And so we're going to be in chapter 2 today, continuing on. And what we saw in the first part of chapter 2 last week is how Paul really starts to open up his heart to this church. He wants them to know that he didn't come to them with disguised intentions or to seek fame or to seek money or to seek his own glory.

He really makes it a point to try to show them what gospel motivation looks like. To say, we did not come to you like this. Like the hucksters and the religious charlatans and the people who were just constantly coming to take advantage of them.

And Jesse walked us through that last week to show us what it's not like. And then as we continue this week, Paul is going to give us the other side of that coin. He's going to say, we didn't come to you with bad motives. We actually came to you to do gospel ministry. Not like this, but like this.

And very interestingly, to help remind them of what that gospel ministry looked like when he was amongst them, he's going to use some very familiar imagery. He's going to use the imagery of a family.

[1 : 27] Now, drawing on the family motif is actually pretty common in our day. If you've been around any kind of sports culture or organizations associated with it, it is really common for sports teams to make it a point to say, we are a family here.

We stand up for each other. We support each other. And then, you know, businesses, kind of corporate America hops on that same bandwagon saying things like, here at XYZ Corporation, we aren't just an organization.

We're a family committed to serving our customers and our employees alike. And in its most charitable form, I think the desire to equate an organization or a team to a family probably comes from a place of somewhat noble intentions, right?

Like what they may be trying to communicate is, as an employee, we want you to feel like more than just a cog in a machine. Like more than just a widget that works here. We want you to feel valued in this place.

It's kind of the same thing, again, on sports teams. It's trying to communicate the idea that I'm not just interested in your athletic talents. I'm not just interested in winning.

[2 : 42] But I'm interested as you in a person. As a matter of fact, if you know anything about college recruiting, that actually makes the difference to a lot of kids when they're choosing what college to come through.

Certainly things like, you know, the name recognition of the college brand and the money and stuff like that matters. But a lot of kids will tell you they went there simply because they felt like the coach actually cared about them.

Like they cared about more than what you could do on the field, but your whole life. What you do while you're here in college and what you do after. So it's not bad imagery. But if we're honest, life experiences has probably given some of us a reason to have a little more cynical eye towards an organization or a movement that tries to use family imagery.

Because sometimes when an organization uses family imagery, they're saying it because they want something else. They're saying it because maybe they want an unhealthy and inappropriate level of loyalty and commitment to them at the expense of other things in your life.

Maybe they want to use that imagery because it gives you a little impetus to manipulate or cross healthy boundaries in someone's life. Right? Sort of that thing that's like, if you really cared about us like a family, you just work later and get this done.

[4 : 05] Like, why do you need your weekends? We're a family here. They want the organization to be a priority in your life.

And because of that, I would say family imagery isn't always appropriate. I'll be honest. If I'm part of a business and they say something like, we are a family here, my first thought is usually, I mean, we are family as long as you give me a paycheck.

Like, I'll be your brother or your cousin or whatever, but if you stop paying me, it's going to get real awkward in here, fam. Like, it's not always appropriate.

But kind of jokes aside, I would venture at least some of you in this room have at some point felt taken advantage of or manipulated by someone or some organization saying we are a family.

And if that's the case, then it makes you more wary of it, including in a church context. And so as we're going to look at this text today, we can sort of acknowledge that we may come into it with some of that baggage.

[5 : 14] But we also want to just see very clearly that the Apostle Paul is not going to shy away from using family language. In fact, he is going to fully embrace it as an appropriate description of what gospel ministry should look like.

And that's kind of my prayer this morning is that as we go through what this scripture reveals, we're going to see that not only is family imagery appropriate for a church, but it's really the best way to describe and give an image of the kind of love and community that God wants with his people.

So we're going to pick up the teaching text today in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, starting in verse 7. If you don't have your Bible, no worries, it'll be on the screen behind me. The Apostle Paul, continuing this church, says, But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil. We worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, of how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct towards you as believers.

[6 : 42] For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

This is God's word to us. Now, we know from last week, Paul's goal in bringing the gospel was not to manipulate or to get something from the Thessalonian church.

And the way he wants to show us that, again, unlike the tricksters and the deceivers who come to take advantage of you, he says, We really did come amongst you like a family. And he calls them to remember that and to judge for themselves what that revealed about them.

And to kind of make that point, Paul uses a lot of different family roles and relationships to demonstrate how gospel ministry works through the lens of a gospel family.

Or maybe to say it another way, Paul is going to show them what gospel family is like to paint a picture of the kind of community that Jesus wants to build. And the first imagery he uses is one that is specifically disarming.

[7 : 55] It specifically follows his claim in the first part of the chapter that they didn't come to take advantage of them. And Paul says, Gospel family is guileless like children.

But we were gentle among you. Sometimes that's actually been rendered, we were like infants among you. You know, it's interesting.

As much as we say we don't want to be manipulated and taken advantage of, we often, in a lot of contexts, also kind of low-key just celebrate guile.

And I think it's because we don't like to be thought of as naive. That doesn't seem flattering to us. But, so if we see someone who is crafty or cunning or kind of artfully deceptive, they know how to play the game at work, they know how to schmooze up to power, they know how to play people against each other without getting caught in the crossfire.

If we're honest, a lot of times we kind of want to think of ourselves like that. Like, we want to be one of the Ocean Eleven's crew, not one of the marks. But that's not the imagery Paul uses.

[9 : 14] We were like infants among you. Infants don't scare anyone. Well, at least not anyone who's not trying to get a full night's sleep. If you're trying to get a full night's sleep, an infant is terrifying.

But other than that, they don't have a master plan. They are not someone to be reckoned with. Infants and children approach the world with much less pretense than we do.

And though it might strike at our pride, this is not the only place in Scripture that God tells us this is how you need to approach life in His kingdom. Matthew 18, it says this, At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And calling to Him a child, He put Him in the midst of them and He said, Truly I say unto you, Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This verse isn't intended to say that children embody some kind of sinless innocence because anybody that's had children knows that's not true.

[10 : 32] But it does mean like a child, no pretense, vulnerable, trusting in Jesus and not your own cunning.

That's how Paul said we came to you. I find it somewhat interesting too, that's how Jesus came to us as well, right? We sung about it this morning, the Lord of infinite glory didn't come in a cloud that would scare us, a cradle in the dirt.

Christian family is not intended to be a chess match. That's not how we interface with each other. And you contrast again that with what Paul said others come to do.

We don't have flattery and we don't have tricks and we're not trying to get your money and we're not trying to make a name for yourself. We came to you vulnerable like children.

Verse 7 is also packed with another family image because Paul also says, Gospel family is gentle like mothers. But we were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her children.

[11 : 49] I think gentle is another one of those words that can sometimes get a bad rap, particularly in the kind of areas of our culture that are aggressive and bombastic.

It can be disparaged as kind of weak or passive to be gentle. But I would submit to you, no one who has actually ever felt a mother's love can think of it like that.

You know, it's cliché and probably somewhat stereotypical, but I would say also very true and fascinating to me that when my kids are in distress, they basically want mom.

I mean, they love me and they will take me as a poor substitute if I'm the only thing available. But if there is a skin knee or a bump on the head or a kiss that is needed to make it better, they want to know where mom is.

And it's interesting because it doesn't matter if I'm right there. Like they fall right in front of me and they get up and I'm like, I'm here and they're like, I gotta find mom. And you know, they go to wherever mom is.

[12 : 54] I'm like, but I'm right here. All right. The gentle love of a mother is a picture of how God cares for his family and how he wants us to care for each other.

You know, incidentally, God is in fact the one who made both fathers and mothers so he knows the depth of it all. So it shouldn't surprise us that God uses imagery like that.

It's not the first time in scripture he's done it. Over in Isaiah 66, chapter 66, verse 12, he's talking to his people and he says, For thus says the Lord, Behold, I will extend to her peace like a river and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream.

And you shall nurse and be carried upon her hip and bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

We may be all grown up, but we still long for a family that is gentle to us like that. You know, when men are on the battlefield, hard men, who have endured things that most of us haven't, who have a grit and a termination that most don't know, and those same men are badly wounded or dying, it is a fact that they often cry out for their mom.

[14 : 23] Paul says, You know we cared for you like that. There was a tenderness, a deep affection, and it's good. Gospel community is supposed to feel like that.

It is supposed to be a soft place to land. And then Paul goes on to say that affection, that gentleness, that disposition didn't make them passive.

It spurred them to action. It made them want to press in to be with them through all the highs and lows because Paul also says, Gospel family is thick or thin like siblings.

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves because you had become very dear to us.

For you remember, brothers, brothers, our labor and toil, we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God.

[15 : 28] Paul says to them, You can't claim that we just said good words but didn't get into the thick of it with you. Whatever you were experiencing, whatever you were facing, we were right there with you.

We didn't come to take your money and you saw that. He said, If we got to get to work, if we got to make tents, we're there. We didn't want, we didn't come because of what you could give us.

We came to be with you. And you know, if you want to know why we talk about community so much here at City Grace, why we encourage you to get in a community group or join a serve team, this is it.

It really isn't because we just want good metrics or to boast about how many people are serving. It's because gospel ministry can't be lived out from an ivory tower.

You cannot be aloof or mysterious. Gospel ministry is done up close. And Paul says, Just like brothers and sisters, we weren't here to just sell you something.

[16 : 41] We didn't just share the gospel. We shared our very selves. And again, if I was wagering, I would bet some of you actually have a testimony that looks a little bit like that.

That maybe the first time you heard the gospel, you weren't convinced, but you did know one thing. The person who shared it to you was a true friend. They were committed to you and to your life and to your blessing without any expectation of return.

And that left an impression. This is probably also a challenge to us that we give up on gospel community way too easily. Do you keep leaning in when it gets a little hard?

When you disagree with someone else in the church? When the vibe doesn't feel right anymore? When the church isn't exactly what you want it to be?

It doesn't do everything you think it should and it doesn't do some of the things you think it should. When it gets hard, Paul says, we got down in the mud with them.

[17 : 54] He didn't come claiming the authoritative rights of an apostle. He came to be like a brother or a sister. And Paul wants you to know that come what may, like brothers, like sisters, he wants this church to know he's there for them.

Finally, finally, Paul says, gospel family is encouraging like fathers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

just as it's hard to overestimate the impact of a gentle love of a mother, it's hard to overestimate the power of the words of a father.

And much could be said about what a father means and does in his family, but the one thing, the calling that Paul zeros in on here is that fathers are to encourage their children.

Literally, to give them courage, to spur them on, to build them up, to challenge them to walk in a kingdom way.

[19 : 21] And fortunately, that cuts both ways. Because when the encouraging words of a father are absent, it leaves a hole. It wants to be filled.

Still worse, when the words of a father are careless or cruel, when they're things that tear down a child or make them feel worthless, it has actually the exact opposite effect.

It takes courage away. It sows doubt and fear and insecurity. And this calls for wisdom in our day because there is a lot of opinion in our culture about what a father is and what he should do.

But I would submit to you, if you really want to know how to be a father, you got to look to the father. Writing to another church in Ephesians, Paul says this, he says, for this reason I bow my knees before the father from whom every family, sometimes that's rendered from who all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with the power through his spirit in your inner being so that through Christ, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith and that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

You know, one of the ways you actually know the father's voice is that he always calls his children to remember who they are and who they belong to.

[21 : 23] Like even when you fail, even when you sin, God reminds you that you are loved, you are his, you have an upward calling, you are my son, you are my daughter and he centers you in that and in that light he convicts you of what you have done that is not fitting for someone who bears that name.

Incidentally, the voice of the accuser typically does that in reverse. He always focuses on what you've done, literally accuses and then he draws a straight line from that to your identity.

You did this, therefore you are unredeemable, dirty, you can't be a child of God, unworthy of the father, but not so with God.

Paul tells us in these verses he wanted that church to know that the waters that they swim in is an unfathomably wide and deep and long ocean of God's love.

He actually literally says you are not capable in your human frame of understanding it. I am praying that the spirit will supernaturally give you the ability to see how big this love is for you.

[22 : 54] That what will root you and ground you and encourage you is that wherever you go you are covered by that ocean of God's love. We love and encourage like fathers when we build each other up in Christ.

And any word we give any challenge we give any conviction we give is couched in that. It is in fact easy to be cynical about when organizations including churches use the word family.

family. But it is more than words to those who belong to Jesus. The body of believers the church that Jesus is inviting to you is not a nameless faithless organization.

It is the hands and feet of his very son and his people all around you. It is the gentle love of a hundred gospel mothers.

It is the encouraging words of a hundred gospel fathers. It is doing life as brothers and sisters that are with you through thick and thin. And if you want that Jesus has made it possible to get in.

[24 : 17] The Bible says that you weren't family but you can be adopted into his family. You can literally be called by his name because of what Jesus has done.

And what Paul has said and what the message is all these years later is this is not a marketing pitch to be a part of an organization. It is an invitation to experience a family.

May God give us the grace to be that kind of gospel family. Amen. So as the band comes up today if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus again just thank you so much for being here.

I know it's strange to walk into a church if this isn't your thing or and I don't know what you think of when you hear the word family. I don't know if it is a word that is one of your greatest sources of joy or it's one of the most painful areas in your life.

But I bet you know it's powerful. There's a reason that the idea of family calls to us and it points us to a kingdom reality.

[25 : 34] Jesus wants you to know. He wants you to know that it is an invitation into not just a family but a kind of family that will endure. A family that takes its name not from any of the things of the world but from the Father.

The Father in heaven. Jesus has made that possible. His God's great love is bridged whatever divided us like the sin that would keep us from being called by that name.

You don't have to be defined by that. That doesn't have to be your identity. Your identity can be a son or a daughter of God.

You can be counted amongst his family because of that grace. If that's your desire this morning man we would love to talk to you about it. There will be a prayer on the screen behind me.

That's maybe a way you can express that or maybe you just want to talk with someone after. That family is open. It is open without regard to respective persons.

[26 : 41] You enter into it not by your resume. It's by his great love. Not what Jesus has done. If you are a follower of Jesus beloved may we do gospel ministry together as a church like this.

If you're sitting here this morning and you realize this isn't how you've been doing community take heart you can repent you can change your mind on that and ask God to show you how great his love is what it's supposed to look and feel like.

Maybe you need a vision for who you should extend that gospel community to. I would say just pray to the Father that he would give you that. God will not ever fail to give you someone to love in his family.

If you want someone to love I promise you God will reveal that to you. And once you've done that once you've come before him for those of us who are followers of Jesus we're going to come to this moment of communion and you're going to come to the table and take the elements back.

And as you contemplate that you know again Jesus when he's reaching the end of his life he prays this prayer where he prays for his disciples and everyone who is to come after them.

[28 : 10] His prayer is Father can they be one like we are one. God this meal is a testament that because of Jesus we are of the same blood.

We are bound together by what he has done. You can take that in testament that you will never not be a part of that family. There is no power in heaven or hell on earth that can separate you from that.

So when you are ready take those elements. Father we give you this moment Holy Spirit have your way. In Jesus name.

holy holy Thank you.