

God's Blueprint for Ministry (Proverbs 16:1-9 & 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16)

17-Feb-19

G'Day Church family.

We're continuing our 9-part series on the Apostle Paul's letter to the church of Thessalonica - and we're looking at Part 3

There are Bibles in front of you and a sermon outline in the bulletin if you want to take notes.

Let me pray for God's help before we begin. Let's pray...

Recap

Last week, we learnt from the apostle Paul that:

Christians are chosen by God

And they are chosen to imitate Christ Jesus

[PowerPoint 1-Recap]

This week - the Apostle Paul gives us a **blueprint** for what this ministry of imitating Christ Jesus looks like...

Intro (Blueprint/Ministry)

So, we'd better explain what Blueprint means, first:

[PowerPoint 2-Blueprint]

Blueprint - is a copy of an architectural technical drawing [usually white lines on a blue background]. A copying process first invented in 1842 to allow rapid and accurate copies of plans to be produced. Like many words today - the term blueprint has changed its meaning - to be used for any plan or design - whether blue or not!

So, Paul gives us a blueprint for ministry here in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

What is ministry anyway?

[PowerPoint 3a-Ministry]

Ministry means serving

And in a Christian sense - Christian serving looks like - sharing our faith in Jesus, and sharing the love of Jesus, with others

We have many ministries here at St. David's - from hospitality and kitchen service at morning tea, bible teaching and bible study, teaching children, teaching adults, prayer, pastoral care, friendship, fellowship, supporting missionaries, reaching out to the community; and the sharing of our time, talents, possessions and money.

So, all of us, are involved in some sort of ministry and so this blueprint (plan) for ministry applies to all of us.

Why would the Apostle Paul feel the need to give us a blueprint (or plan) for ministry?

Well - because - as the Apostle Paul says in another of his letters to the church in Corinth

[PowerPoint 3b-Reconcile]

God has given us, as Christians, the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18)

So, we can share with the people we come across, the Good News, that Jesus gives everyone the opportunity to be reconciled to God

Reconcile means - restoring a broken relationship

The relationship between God and humankind was broken because of humankind's sin and rebellion against God - Jesus restores this broken relationship - by taking the blame and punishment for that sin and rebellion against God - upon Himself - on the cross. And so that reconciliation is available to everyone - our job is to share this fact. And Paul gives us a blueprint...

What does this blueprint of ministry look like?

It looks having...Motives worth imitating (vv1-8)

Motives worth imitating (vv1-8)

[PowerPoint 4-Motives]

- Paul treats the Thessalonians as **family** - they are his brothers and sisters in Christ (see v1) - we should treat each other here at St. David's as family
- Paul teaches with **boldness** in v2 - despite his previous persecution in Philippi - Paul dared to tell the Thessalonians the gospel of Jesus - in the face of opposition in Thessalonica
- Paul taught God's message of Jesus **without error** in v3. Teaching **truth** from God's Word is so important - otherwise we could lead people astray. We should never be altering the gospel just to make it more acceptable to

people. We must always call out sinful behaviour - but at the same time love the sinner.

- Paul taught with **integrity** - **no impure motives** and **no trickery** in v3. By impure here, Paul means immoral behaviour such as trying to persuade people by being sexual or lustful or seductive. And by trickery here - Paul means telling them lies to get them to believe - like God will understand your sin, God wants you to be happy - that sort of thing...
- Paul knew he was **approved by God** to teach the Gentiles (non-Jews) and he had confidence that God had **entrusted** him with the perfect message of Jesus - the Gospel - see v4. We can have that same confidence knowing we have the greatest news of all to tell people
- Paul's motive was to always **please God not people** see v4. Paul knew God could test his heart and know that Paul's motives were sound. If we please people instead of pleasing God, then we're making it all about us and not about God - we're drawing attention to ourselves - and not to Jesus. We're saying it's more important that we're liked than for people to hear God's message. And that's idolatry of ourselves and it is a sin!
- Paul never used **flattery** see v5. Flattery is excessive and insincere praise given to someone - to further one's own interest. It's buttering someone up so they'll do us a favour or give us gifts. Not only is this wrong Paul says - but it can and will be seen as fake
- It can also lead to appearing **greedy** - still in v5 - which is Paul's point. Paul was not in ministry for the money or possessions or gifts or prestige or fame. Paul was in ministry purely for the sake of Jesus

- Paul is single minded in always wanting **to bring glory and praise to God** and not to himself - in v6.
- Paul says he could have asserted his authority as an **Apostle** - called and appointed by God - but he didn't do that - see v6
- Instead in v7 - he was always **gentle (like a child)** with them and in v8 he says he was like a nursing mother. A **nursing mother** thinks only of the child she's nursing and doesn't expect anything from the child. In the same way Paul is saying - ministry is all about serving - and not about receiving - that's a picture of the agape - sacrificial and unconditional love that we learned about a couple of weeks ago - the love Jesus showed to us on the cross - the love Paul shows to the Thessalonians - and the love of Jesus we show to others in the ministries we're involved in
- That love Paul says - shows itself in how much he loved the Thessalonians - it's not just a job - it's a **labour of love** - to the point where in v8 - he wants to not only teach them the Gospel but to **share his life with them**. Any ministry we're involved in - should not be seen as just a job - but as the outworking of the Gospel of love in Jesus - AND - the desire to share our lives with one another - to cry with one another, grieve with one another, pray with one another, rejoice with one another and laugh with one another.

[PowerPoint 5a-Challenge]

Challenge: Let's examine our motives - why are we serving in the ministry we're involved in? For ourselves or for Jesus?

Christian Missionary Hudson Taylor – OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) – was responsible for bringing over 800 missionaries to China. He often asked missionaries why they wanted to be a foreign missionary. He received answers like “Christ commanded us to go and make disciples” and “they are millions perishing without knowing Jesus” Hudson Taylor’s view was that such motives may fail in times of testing, trials, tribulations and persecution – because the one true motive that will sustain people is the love of Christ.

The apostle Paul says the same thing in 2 Cor 5:14-15:

[PowerPoint 5b-2 Cor 5:14-15]

¹⁴ For **Christ’s love compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should **no longer live for themselves but for him who died** for them and was raised again.

Is Christ’s love compelling us to keep going in our ministry? Knowing that we no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died and was raised for us?

(pause)

The next part of God’s Blue Print is living a life worth imitating (vv9-12)

Life worth imitating (vv9-12)

[PowerPoint 6-Life]

- Paul **worked night and day** - see v9 - He was a conscientious worker. This could be referring to Paul’s work as a tentmaker (Acts 18) which he did to support himself financially in his missionary journeys. This verse could also

be referring to Paul's dedication to ministry working day and night to support the Thessalonians pastorally and spiritually

- The point is - ministry is **never a 9 to 5 job** - and often requires going the extra mile or two... That was Paul's life and it is worth imitating.
- Paul also describes he and his fellow missionaries' lifestyle as **holy, righteous, and blameless** in verse 10
 - Holy here means - set apart for God - to do God's will and be obedient to God's will - we are to be doing God's will in ministry not our own
 - Righteous here means - right with God - and living a lifestyle that pleases God
 - And blameless here means - no one can point the finger at us for our behaviour
- As missionaries - Paul and his mates - were more accountable - they had to be modelling a **behaviour that was exemplary** so that people would notice how different Christians behaved and would then copy that lifestyle for themselves
- Paul's behaviour was also **fatherly** - as a loving father deals with his children in v11 and v12
 - **Encouraging** - not putting people down and criticizing - yes there are times when people have to be corrected - but doing it in a way that encourages people to feel supported and have confidence they can do better - and not in a way that makes them feel like giving up

- **Comforting** - being caring and sensitive to a person's grief or distress - being sympathetic and empathetic to their current situation - never minimizing what they're going through
- **An Urging** people to live lives worthy of God and worthy of being a Christian

[PowerPoint 7a-Challenge]

Challenge: Are we living lives that are worth imitating?

[PowerPoint 7b-2 Cor 5:20]

In the same passage that Paul tells us we all have a ministry of reconciliation.

Paul also says: ²⁰ *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.* (2 Cor 5:20)

Ambassadors represent their country and make their country proud.

We represent Jesus and our eternal country of Heaven. Are we making Jesus proud of us in how we represent Him?

(pause)

God's blueprint for ministry will also look like being thankful for the effective word of God (v1 and v13)

Thankful for the Effective Word of God (v1, 13)

[PowerPoint 8-Word]

- Paul was very **thankful for God's word** - it hadn't been a failure in Thessalonica - it had produced results; the Thessalonians believed in Jesus - and there was now a church there!

- God's word is not just dead words in History - God's Word is alive and active and pierces our hearts and minds (Heb 4:12)
- God's word was effective in Thessalonica - because in v13
 - It was received as the WORD of GOD and not human words
 - Because it was heard and accepted (i.e. it was believed)
 - When people believe the message of Jesus - that's effective ministry
- So, Paul was continually thankful for that
- You see, God's Word
 - Produces faith (Rom 10:17) as people hear God's Word
 - It has the power to save people (Rom 1:16-17)
 - It causes people to be born again (1 Peter 1:22-23)
 - It causes spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:2)
 - It overcomes Satan as Jesus overcame Satan with God's Word - when tempted (Matt 4:1-11)

[PowerPoint 9-Challenge]

Challenge: Are we continually thankful - when we see people come to believe in Jesus - or when we see people respond in a positive way to God's word
(pause)

As part and parcel of God's blueprint for ministry - we must be prepared to participate in suffering as believers - that's in verses 14 to 16

Prepared to Participate in Suffering (vv14-16)

[PowerPoint 10-Suffering]

- Paul says, the *Thessalonians imitated the churches in Judea* (churches like the one in Jerusalem) -just like the churches in Judea suffered at the hands of their own people - the Jews. The church in Thessalonica suffered from opposition from their own people - see v14
- Paul says the Churches in Judea suffered from at the hands of some of *the Jews - who killed Jesus and killed the prophets* (like Elijah, Zechariah and Stephen), and who persecuted the apostles and drove missionaries out - v15
- Even the Apostle Paul persecuted Christians before he became a believer
- These Jews (not all of them) also kept missionaries from speaking to the Gentiles about Jesus - and stopped people being saved - see v16 - but God's not going to stand for that - because all they're doing is heaping up more sin for God to be angry with them about
- Paul's point is that - anyone who tries to stop others hearing about Jesus will experience God's wrath
- In the meantime - all Christians must suffer - Jesus said there was a cost in following Him

[PowerPoint 11-Challenge]

Challenge: Are we prepared for suffering? from non-Christians? from our families who don't understand our faith in Jesus? from people who don't get our motives? from people who falsely accuse us? We will suffer - that's part of being a believer

(pause)

Conclusion

[PowerPoint 11a-Conclusion]

So, we've seen what God's blueprint for ministry looks like:

Having motives worth imitating

Living a life worth imitating

Giving thanks for God's Word

And being prepared to suffer for Jesus' sake

I just want to finish with another thought though:

I came across this poem the other day...

by Minnie Lee Bovender

Tw'as a sheep, not a lamb, that strayed away

In the parable Jesus told.

A grown-up sheep that had gone astray

From the ninety and nine in the fold.

Out in the meadows out in the cold

Tw'as a sheep the Good Shepherd sought

Back to the flock, and into the fold

Tw'as a sheep the Good Shepherd brought

Why, for the sheep, should we earnestly long,

And so earnestly hope and pray?

Because there is danger, if they go wrong,

[PowerPoint 11b-poem]

They will lead the young lambs astray.

For the lambs follow the sheep, you know,

Wherever the sheep may stray,

If the sheep go wrong, it will not be long

Till the lambs are as wrong as they.

So, with the sheep, we earnestly plead

For the sake of the lambs today,

If the lambs are lost, what a terrible cost

Some sheep may have to pay.

So, my final thought is - as Sheep - if we don't follow God's blueprint for

Ministry - we could be leading little lambs (i.e. our children) astray and we'll be answerable to God for that...

Let's pray...