

Leadership in Biblical Perspective
“Legacy Leaders and Legacy Leadership”
I Thessalonians 1:2–10
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In our book of church order it says in services such as this that it is appropriate and right to have the preaching of the Word and therefore I'd like to do so by first looking at I Thessalonians 1. Before we look at the text one of the things that has intrigued me is the study of leadership. I believe leadership always works. You might think 'what if a church goes into a difficult time, did that leadership work?' Yes, it was just bad leadership. I didn't say only good leadership works but I think all leadership works. I think Jesus hints at this when He says 'when all is said and done the pupil becomes like the teacher and the servant like the master' (Matthew 10:24, 25). Then He tells us if the blind lead the blind it works for they both fall into the pit (Matthew 15:14). Leadership works. So we want the precious kindness of our God to grant to His church, not the leadership we deserve but the leadership that we need. I have called this study legacy leadership and I'll explain in a moment why I have called it that.

In my study of leadership, realizing my own shortcomings and my own desires to be an effective leader, then to realize what leaders I learn from and how I learn from them, there is one thing that keeps coming back to me. For the long term, faithfulness and fruitfulness, the key to legacy leadership is that they know how to do the basics well. This was emphasized for me from the sport of golf. I'm sure Paul played it because he said he finished the course and I'm sure he was talking about a golf course.

When I was sent from Briarwood to plant a church in Charlotte, North Carolina, I asked Frank Barker to come and speak at our first mission's conference which took place in our second year as a church plant. He was not a golfer but a tennis player and our soundman at the time was a pro tennis teacher so he took Frank out to play tennis. Frank told me this had been a great trip for him and I thought it would have something to do with the new church plant but he said this tennis pro taught him how to do the drop shot properly in tennis which he apparently couldn't do before. So that is how I found out his love for tennis. So when I came to take over for Frank at Briarwood people wanted to know if I played tennis as well. I said 'No, for that is the old covenant and golf is the new covenant.' The old covenant was tennis for David 'served' in Saul's court and the new covenant is that Paul finished the 'course' so that is golf.

There are many reasons why I love the game of golf and it's not because I play it consistently well. My hero is the sport of golf when I was in college was Jack Nicklaus. I tried to learn everything I could by the way he played the game of golf so when he came out with his book titled My Story I bought it, read it and devoured it. There was a lot that was said in that book that was interesting but one thing he shared has stuck with me and that is this; he said every year he would finish the season in October he would put aside his clubs for a month and a half. He would enjoy Christmas and then after Christmas he would start practicing for the next season. Then he would go from Miami to Ohio to see his only coach that he ever had beginning when he was a junior player whose name was Jack Grout. It was almost like a ritual that would never be violated for he would say to him 'Mr. Grout teach me how to play golf.' Mr. Grout then would start with him like you with someone who was learning to play golf. He would show him first the grip on the club and say 'If you don't hold the club right, you'll never be able to swing it right.' So here's the grip. Here's the takeaway. Here's the turn. Here's down the line and

here's the way you finish the swing. He would give him those five basic lessons and he would repeat them.

I read that and then realized he was serious because Mr. Nicklaus knew that anyone who does what they do well, knew how to do the basics and repeat them consistently. Legacy leadership and legacy leaders know the basics so I don't have anything exotic or exhaustive to give you in this study about leadership. I don't think I have any great insight for you in this study but I do believe there are three things that identify legacy leaders and legacy leadership. All of you to some degree somewhere are in a position of leadership. If you are a husband God has called you to a position of leadership for your wife. If you are parents you are leading your children. If you are a Christian we are supposed to be leading people to Christ. Likely in the structure of your business there will be somebody you are leading. I have framed these three things particularly for those who lead the church from the office of a teaching or ruling elder.

These three things will come from this text in I Thessalonians from the Apostle Paul. I Thessalonians 1:2–10 says [2] *We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, [3] remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. [4] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, [7] so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. [8] For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. [9] For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned (repented) to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

I strongly recommend a book titled Gleanings from Paul or The Prayers of the Apostle by A.W. Pink, a Calvinistic Baptist. This is somewhat arguable but I would contend to you that there are 17 recorded prayers of the Apostle Paul in his epistles. Paul wrote 13 epistles with nine of them to churches and four of them to individuals which is where these 17 prayers come from. If you think Paul wrote Hebrews then there are probably more prayers. Almost all of the 17 prayers are found in the opening chapters and almost all of them start with thanksgiving. This is a wonderful opportunity to study the prayer life of Paul.

Paul generally gives thanks for three things. In I Corinthians we find that the Apostle Paul elevates three Christian virtues – faith, hope and love. As we see in this I Thessalonians text in many of them he uses these three in the framing of his prayers. Faith while it is an act of trusting it is a work of obedience. There is the labor of love and the steadfastness of hope. Notice that these three things don't take the place of Jesus but those three virtues are because of Jesus, in Jesus and from Jesus.

Paul makes an astounding comment I Thessalonians 1:4. He basically says that 'we know God has elected you.' How does Paul know if God elected them? Paul wasn't there in the counsel of the Trinity, from eternity whereby the elect were foreknown (before they existed), loved intimately by God because of His grace, so how does he know that those in Thessalonian make up part of the elect. Paul knows this by what he tells us in verse 5. The Gospel benefited them with power, with the work of the Holy Spirit and it came with full conviction and they would have never done that if God sovereignly had not elected them and sent His Spirit to them.

Full conviction came because of God's election and that was the evidence of God's electing grace in their life.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a ministry so that someone observing that ministry is able to say 'because of God's blessing on your ministry in the lives of the people you lead, when I go to other churches I don't even need to say anything for they are already lined up wanting to become Christians because they have heard about what has happened in your life'? When Paul shows up they have already heard about them. We heard that when the Gospel came to them it came in power, with the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. When they ramped up the first persecution outside of Jerusalem you stayed at your faithfulness to follow Christ with perseverance and they received the Word in affliction with joy. To have a ministry where people hear about it in faraway places, relatively speaking, such as Macedonia and Achaia, from Thessalonica and then when Paul gets there the people are ready to talk about this Jesus they have already heard about through Paul's ministry at Thessalonica. They had heard that they were steeped in paganism and idolatry and repented of their idolatry to come to the living God.

They also had heard about two identifying marks in their life. One is they loved to serve Jesus and simultaneously they were waiting on Jesus to come back for them. Many times we can't put those two things together for we wait for Jesus and quit serving Him or we serve Him and forget that our real hope is when He comes again. They were able to look forward waiting for the blessed hope, the appearing of their great God and Savior Christ Jesus but that did not diminish their serving Jesus for now. They kept on turning from idols to the one true and living God that they might put their trust in Him. That is what Paul's ministry did for them which spread to others. Here the witness of their Gospel lives plowed up the ground in pre-evangelism so that when Paul showed up he was already reaping a harvest that had been done from their response to their ministry in their lives. I would love to continually see that kind of ministry done here.

I actually get this opportunity. I was playing that sanctified game of golf on a vacation in South Carolina and I'm on the tee. A man says to me 'what do you do?' I said 'I have a great job. It's out of this world. My boss hires and never fires those whom He hires. The benefit package is just beyond this world.' He said 'What kind of job is that?' I said 'I'm a Christian and a pastor.' He said 'Oh really? You guys always do things like that.' I said 'Well I gotcha so let's talk about it.' So we began to talk about it. He then asked me 'What church do you pastor?' We were almost finished with the round by the time we got there and my answer to him was 'Briarwood Presbyterian Church.' He said 'Really? When we finish I'd like to talk with you.' I found out the reason he wanted to talk more with me was long before I had gotten there he had relatives whose marriages had fallen apart but were saved through the help of one of the members of Briarwood and that just opened the door for me to share Jesus. I could give you more of those illustrations.

So God would You give a ministry to us that we as leaders in Your church are able to see the hand of Your blessing that manifest Your electing grace? It is opening the doors for evangelism. It is creating opportunities to share Christ with others. God I praise Your Name. Would You give us that kind of ministry? I believe that kind of ministry is available by the grace of God and there are three very basic things in that ministry that come from this text in I Thessalonians 1.

Number one is a legacy leader and legacy leadership in the church of Jesus Christ is utterly, relentlessly committed to a Gospel ministry of the Word of God. I Thessalonians 1:4-5a says [4] *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5a] because our gospel*

came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. He is saying that when the Gospel came to them in Word they responded in the work of the Holy Spirit in power and full conviction and that Gospel came to you so that's how I know your election but they responded that way because Paul, Silas and Timothy came speaking the Gospel. It didn't come in just Word only but in the power of the Holy Spirit with full conviction but it did come in Word. Romans 10:17 says [17] *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

So legacy leadership is a Gospel speaking ministry. We share the Good News of the Gospel. We find different ways to do it. The most fundamental is in the preaching and teaching of it. Sometimes it is done in personal evangelism and sometimes in personal fellowship. It is done in many ways but we speak the Gospel. We are to proclaim the Gospel. It can't come with full conviction, in power and in the Holy Spirit unless it comes in Word, by the Holy Spirit to those who are hearing it.

Secondly, we not only have a Gospel ministry of proclamation but we have a Gospel ministry of mentoring for instruction. You are being very specific with people. Here is the idolatry we need to turn from. Here is the God you need to know that you might serve and love. Here is the emptiness of idolatry and the fullness, majesty, supremacy and sovereignty of our great God. You are teaching them. You do this step by step even in a public arena, private arena and in small groups. In all those venues you are intentionally mentoring people in the Gospel ministry.

People seem to always be writing curriculum for discipleship and praise the Lord for that but I want to make a personal appeal as a Gospel minister to you. This is just practical on my part and kind of like a personal burden I want to give to you. I think the greatest discipleship tool ever created by the secondary inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the shorter catechism. I have met nothing that beats it. I believe it is one of the most effective mentoring tools that you can ever use in ministry. We who have it as part of our constitution don't necessarily use it. We'll refer to it or call upon it but it was made for using in mentoring and study. As they put together the Westminster Confession they realized this was good stuff, now the Presbyterians kept it while everyone else left it. They realized they needed to be able to teach this stuff. So get something that pastors can teach their elders and then make something that parents/fathers can teach their children. The larger catechism is what pastors use to teach elders and the shorter catechism is the discipleship tool used by parents/fathers to teach their children.

When our family goes on vacation my children know we are going to visit one of three things – a battlefield, a cemetery or an old church – we'll probably go to all three of them at some point. My wife can vouch for this. When I go into old churches I will usually see three murals, usually very well done with an item on each of those murals. They are there for people to drink of it, eat of it, imbibe of it, referred to in worship services and they are always there in most old evangelical churches. The three things were the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed. Welcome to the shorter catechism – an exposition of the Apostles Creed, an exposition of the Lord's Prayer, an exposition of the Law of God and its right use. So use the good instruments God has provided for us when mentoring. If you want to be inventive that's fine but there are some good instruments I encourage you to use.

Thirdly, is that legacy leaders are a Gospel model of the ministry they mentor. I Thessalonians 1:6 says [6] *And you **became imitators of us** and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.* When you lead, other than the speaking of God's Word that defines modeling, there is probably nothing more important than you living

out the Word that our Gospel comes to you in Word and deed. We have a Gospel ministry that comes in Word by mentoring and that comes in deed by modeling.

I am speculating when I say this, but it is my conviction that 80 percent of everything you learn you did by imitation. So I am going to use an example here. Think of a family who has children. Who is the primary person in the family to teach the kids to speak their language? It is usually the mother. Everyone born is not born with the innate ability to speak a language. Now you are born in the image of God with the ability to communicate but you have to be taught. The most amazing pedagogical feat takes place right before us day after day and that is a woman called a mother, who is not trained will teach her child a foreign language with no point of reference. That is absolutely astounding. When I learned Greek, Hebrew, Spanish and Latin I had to use vocabulary cards that had the English word and the other word I was trying to learn. Babies don't come with vocabulary cards. They are starting from scratch and so is the mother who wasn't even trained to teach them.

Why are the mothers so successful at this? There are two reasons for this. Number one is the peculiarities and there is something distinctive between men and women for our equality is not sameness and interchangeability. We are equal but different, praise the Lord! When men hug each other it's usually a one arm hug and a pat pat but when I hug my wife I don't feel the same way, praise the Lord. A mother's love is different than a father's love and it's not superior, inferior or better or worse, it's just different and both are needed in a child's life. One of the things a mother has though is that nurturing ability.

When I taught my kids how to count all three of them would want to skip the number ten every time they would count. I would begin to lose patience with them and my wife would begin to pat me to calm me down. My wife never seemed to lose patience. It was amazing to see that nurturing instinct my wife had or a mother has. There is a reason the father names the child and after I baptize them I give that child back to their mother trying to give everyone including that family a message, for that mother is gifted to nurture in a very special way. Those are some of the distinctions we have with each other and the mother develops this.

The second reason the mother is successful is the child is born with the impulse to imitate. I have several grandchildren and I was determined that the first words out of my youngest grandchild would be 'pap paw.' When she was born within hours I was holding her in front of me repeating 'pap paw' and every time she would come over to my house I was saying 'pap paw' and I know you are thinking this is just grandfather talk but I'm telling you it's the truth. Even in those early days I could see her looking at me trying to get this in focus and starting to move her mouth. She is an imitator.

That is why the world keeps putting celebrities in front of your children and that's why you need to get better models in front of your children, not people that live off of a culture but people producing cultures worth living in. You and I need to be models of the faith. That is why Jesus said 'what you have seen and heard in Me...' We also see in the Bible where it says 'All that Jesus began to do and teach' where modeling gathers up the mentoring and mentoring is delivered through modeling. I believe the key to legacy leadership is Gospel mentoring through modeling.

We have some here who have stepped into some wonderful ministries that have been engaged by legacy leaders before them and I praise the Lord for them. I thank the Lord for what they did and how the Lord blessed them. Those that came before them are their biggest cheerleaders right now and they are excited about what those currently will build on. While we thank God for that we don't have to live in the past because today we have put in place, prayed

for and installed leaders who now can have a legacy leadership. They will have a legacy leadership because it is Gospel-centered, Gospel-mentoring and Gospel-modeling. That is what God will use so that the Word would sound forth and we can equip Christians who worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege to see what You are doing and the way that You are doing it, to benefit from it and participate in it. I would pray that You would bless these new leaders in wonderful, marvelous ways and may Your people encourage them, respond to them and may they be Gospel leaders who lead the legacy of the Gospel proclaimed, mentored and modeled. Then we will give You the praise because these are not leaders we deserve, for they have been framed by Your hand and given to Your church. We give You praise and give to them encouragement. Give us through them the ability to see and hear our Savior for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.