

1 Thessalonians 2 • The marks of genuine ministry

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

We're going to read through chapter 2, pray, and see what the Lord has for us here. Goes like this,

“¹ For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ 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.

⁹ 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 proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² 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.

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.” (ESV)

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, first of all, just thank you for Your Word. Lord, we thank you also for the presence and power of your Holy Spirit who makes that Word alive to our hearts. But more than that, applies that Word to our lives in ways that we need.

Lord, we come before you because we need you, and we need the Scriptures. We need the Word of God filling our hearts and minds so that we might walk in wisdom all the days of our lives. We desperately need discernment and understanding, especially living in these days.

And so we pray for your Holy Spirit to move upon our hearts and to open our eyes to see things that we might otherwise not see, and to open our ears to hear what we would otherwise not hear. We ask you to do this work, Father, in Jesus' precious name, amen. Amen.

You know, as I said, we started the book of Thessalonians last week. And I talked to you guys about the fact that Paul had only been in the city for three weeks. I mean, three short weeks before a disturbance arose and forced him and his team to leave town and go on to other cities along their route.

And I say a disturbance, but it was really kind of more like a riot. So, Paul, as we mentioned last week, being concerned for the believers that had responded to the gospel there in Thessalonica, sent Timothy back to see how they were doing and, you know, to check on them.

So, I want you to stop for just a moment, and I want you to think about if this had happened in our world today. Imagine somebody came to Ontario and they shared a message about God. And three weeks later, three weeks after they got here, they were driven out of town. They were literally forced to leave town with a riot. And you'd probably be reading about it in the newspaper and, you know, and all else.

What would you think about that message? What would you think about that person who came to share the word and who got run out of town? Would you maybe, because of that, question what they had come to share? I mean, would you think to yourself, I wonder if the guy was a crackpot. Maybe it's a fraud. Maybe some people saw some things that we didn't see, and that's why they

basically ran him out of town. And I think a lot of people would probably think just like that. And Paul was very concerned about that possibility that people's hearts and minds had perhaps been influenced by the fact that he and his team had been run out of town.

And so, Paul wrote this, essentially what we call 1 Thessalonians 2. To basically speak to them about their ministry, as short as it was, among them there in Thessalonica, because you see, Paul always was very concerned about the message of the gospel being held in high regard. And, you know, so this chapter is all about whether or not somebody's ministry is genuine. Paul was concerned that because of what happened, they would consider his ministry there disingenuous.

It's interesting because I get contacted by people regularly who want to know about some ministry, and they'll write or email or whatever and say, hey, I heard such and such, or so and so, or this guy said, or I heard this pastor preaching such and such, or we went to this church and they were doing such and such. And I want to know if this is on the level. I want to know if this is biblical. I want to know if this is right. You know, I mean, it happens a lot.

And I just got, in this last week, like two emails from people who had questions just like that. And they wonder how they can know if somebody has godly intentions and whether it's safe to receive from that person's ministry. You know, how do I know? So we know that this is a real concern because, you know, Jesus told us in Matthew chapter 7 he said,

Matthew 7:15-16 (ESV)

“Beware of false prophets, who come... in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”

And so you need to be very careful. And then in the last days, Jesus warned us in Matthew 24 saying,

Matthew 24:11 (ESV)

“...many false prophets will rise and lead many astray.”

So we know that this is a genuine issue. The issue of, is this guy's ministry good? Is it genuine? Is it real? Is it right? Is it biblical? And how can I know? How can I know? Well, this chapter is full of great insights, and it gives us kind of a blueprint, if you will, of how we can recognize the real deal when it comes to ministry. When it comes to somebody whose ministry you turn on your TV and you listen to somebody for a while, pretty tough to kind of tell what's really

going on, isn't it? But Paul gives us some great insights here into what is genuine, one, and what is real.

He begins, look with me again in your Bible. In verse 1 of this chapter, he says, "*You yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.*" And that's again, that's a very interesting statement in light of the fact that they got run out of town after just three weeks. But because you understand, right? Paul's ministry among the Thessalonians wasn't that great for him. You know, it might have been fine for those people that accepted the Lord, but it didn't go very well for him.

And yet Paul said, "*Our coming to you was not in vain.*" And the word "vain" means empty. Our trip there to Thessalonica wasn't an empty one. And frankly, this first statement that Paul makes is one of the most important things to recognize or to help you and me recognize a true and genuine ministry of the Lord. And if you're taking notes, this is the first point. Number 1 is,

Point 1:

Success is determined by good things happening to the people — not the leadership.

See, it wasn't, again, the trip to Thessalonica for Paul was one of humiliation and frustration. He only got to stay for three weeks, and he got run out of town because people were lying about him.

And yet he says, he writes to the people and says, hey, our trip among you was good. Good for who? It was good for the people. It was good for the people who came to Christ. You with me? That tells you something about godly leadership. They care more about the people than they care about their own comfort, their own convenience, or their own happiness.

And that's an important thing for you and I to remember. Look what Paul goes on to say in verse 2: "*But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.*"

Do you remember what Paul's talking about when he talks about what happened to Philippi? Remember, do you guys remember? Paul went to Philippi with Silas, and you remember there wasn't a Jewish synagogue, so they just went down to the water's edge to kind of pray and hang out with people, and you remember what happened? They met some people that responded to the gospel, but there was also that young girl.

You guys remember? And she had a demon. She was possessed by a demon, and she was yelling, where in fact it went on for days. She followed Paul around for days, yelling, "*These men are servants of the Most High God, and they're telling you the way to be saved,*" over and over. And finally, Paul had enough, and he turned, and he spoke to the demon, and he cast that demon out of that girl. (Acts 16:16-18)

Do you remember? Well, she was a slave, and her owners were making money using this demonic spirit in this poor little girl to tell fortunes. Well, they realized with the demon gone, their means of making money was gone. So they stirred up trouble, you remember, in Philippi and got Paul and Silas brought before the magistrates of the city. And it says that they were beaten. Listen to this. This is how Luke describes what happened in Philippi. He says,

Acts 16:22-24 (ESV)

The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

"*The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them.*" Can you imagine being hauled in front of the local magistrates, and they're ripping your clothes off? Well, they had a reason for doing it. It wasn't just humiliation. And it says, "*...they gave orders to beat them with rods.*" So they began to beat them. And it says, listen to Luke's description, "*And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks.*"

Guys, that's what happened to Paul right before he got to Thessalonica. That was just days before he got to Thessalonica. And so Paul is saying in these verses here, we came to you, we shared the gospel to you, even in the shadow of what had just transpired in Philippi, and we were not dissuaded from coming to tell you the truth. And this is the second way you and I can recognize a true and genuine ministry. And if you're taking notes, this is it.

Point 2:

There is boldness in the face of suffering

In those ministry leaders there is boldness in the face of suffering. And I got to be completely honest with you and tell you that this point makes me a little

uncomfortable. I'm uncomfortable because I'm sure that you've probably been reading the news or hearing at least that there are churches all over the country that are right now falling into disfavor with their local governments because they are, in some way, shape, or form, defying what they consider to be unfair, and in most cases, unconstitutional actions by the governing officials concerning the restrictions that are being placed upon them as it relates to their gatherings, you know, their weekly gatherings.

And so here I am, telling you that one of the signs of a true and genuine ministry is leaders who are bold in the face of persecution. So pray for pastors, pray for pastors who are making tough decisions. And, by the way, it's not a one-size-fits-all decision. Can I just... I need to encourage you with that.

Just because the guy down the street makes a decision to go one way doesn't mean that another pastor is going to do the same. Don't expect guys to be uniform. The Holy Spirit's going to speak to churches individually, at least the ones that are listening. And I'm trying to listen to the Holy Spirit as to what he wants us to do for Calvary Chapel, Ontario. I really am. So I covet your prayers too.

And you know, last week I sat up here and I told you not to give in to a spirit of fear, you know, because there's a lot of that going around. But I encourage you, you know, that we already have a master, and that's Jesus. We don't have room for another one called fear. And I stand by that.

But you know, it's when you see everything kind of going on in the world, you know, it can be challenging. There have been three local state supreme courts that have already ruled against churches and, you know, stood with their local governors, their state governors saying, you know, that these restrictions stand and so forth.

And so, you know, there's a lot of pastors that are looking at this situation, myself included, and having to make really tough decisions about this. But you know, we need to be led by the Holy Spirit. Amen. I mean, I think that's just absolutely critical. Notice what else Paul mentions.

Look with me now at verse 3 in the text. He says, *“For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man (in other words, not to tickle the ears of people), but to please God who (is the ultimate) test (of all things related to) our hearts.”*

And Paul is basically saying that when we came into your area, we didn't bring mere opinion. We didn't come to tell you what we thought you wanted to hear. You know, you can always draw a crowd by telling people, God wants you rich all the time and whatever you want, God wants you to have it. I can get a crowd together preaching that message. The problem is, it's just not true.

But you know, there are a lot of people who aren't really interested in hearing what's true. They just want to hear what they want to hear. And what Paul is saying here is when we came to you, to Thessalonica, we didn't just tell you we weren't man pleasers. We were attempting at all times to be God pleasers from the standpoint of telling you the truth, even if it was a hard truth, even if it was difficult to hear; we came to tell you what was true. And you know, Paul loved it when people checked it, checked up on him.

Do you remember the people in Berea? You know, right after Paul was thrown out of Thessalonica, do you know the next place he went was Berea. What did he find in Berea? Let me read this for you. This is Luke's description. He says, the brothers, this is from Acts chapter seven,

Acts 17:10-11(ESV)

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night (that's from Thessalonica) to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.” (It says) “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”

In other words, they were checking on what Paul said to see if he was full of hooey or whether he was telling the truth. I like that. Paul considered it a good thing. Luke says they were more noble. Why? Because they checked up on the truth. They didn't, they weren't willing to believe it just because Paul said it. They said we're going to check to see if it's really so, and this is the third way to recognize a true and genuine ministry of the Lord.

Point 3:

They don't mind people questioning them and asking tough questions

And they certainly don't mind people checking to make sure that they have their biblical facts straight. Listen, if you ever go up to a pastor who made some statement that you don't understand, and you ask him to clarify it or to give you more biblical background for that statement, and if that pastor or Bible teacher or Bible study leader gets upset with you, gets frustrated, or starts putting you down because you're even asking the question and starts accusing you of having no faith, don't walk—run to the next Bible study.

You need to find a new leader because it is considered to be a noble thing when you say, I want to know more, and I want to check that out and see if that's true. And if the person who's leading the Bible study can't prove it, they shouldn't be teaching it. That's kind of the bottom line.

You know, I got a call from my daughter a few months back, my youngest daughter who asked me to come help her buy a car. She had found this car in Boise that she liked, and she's 26 years old. She doesn't know a whole lot about cars, so she wanted her dad to help out. So it's like, you know, okay, sure, sweetie. I'll go with you to Boise. We went to the place, and we looked at this car, and you know, I'm always kind of leery. You know, if there are some car salesmen among us, God bless you, but unfortunately, some dealers have kind of sullied the name.

But this guy was really interesting. You know, we went and looked at his car, and I'm kind of walking around, you know, kicking the tires and this and that, and he said, "Listen, you take this car to any mechanic that you want, and you get them to thoroughly check it out before you buy this thing. I want to make sure, you know..." And I was really impressed by that. You know, he wasn't trying to pull a fast one on us. He was willing to just let us look, I mean, really investigate, look under the hood, and see what was going on. And I thought, you know, that's cool. I like that. And Paul is basically talking about the same thing as it relates to his ministry and showing us that's a sign of what is genuine and what is true.

Let's go on. Verse 5. He says, "*For we never came with words of flattery, (as you know), nor with a pretext for greed...*" Greed is the big key word there. Apparently, there were already traveling speakers and teachers during that time that were going from town to town and really they just wanted money.

So what would they do? They'd flatter people. Oh, you guys are the best, you're the best. And they just, you know, butter them up and to the point where they'd be, they'd give their money. And Paul says, you know, very well, we didn't come to you that way. We didn't come, and we didn't just sit and flatter you

with all kinds of words just to get something out of you. There were no thinly veiled suggestions from us about money or support or anything like that. We didn't drop any hints. And I believe this is the fourth way to recognize a true and genuine ministry of the Lord. Here it is, number four,

Point 4:

When it comes to finances, they don't just preach about trusting God, they demonstrate it.

You know, I believe one of the truest ways of demonstrating trust in the Lord for Christian leaders is not to ask for money. I really do.

And, you know, if you skip down to verse 9 in this text, look what Paul says there. He says, "*For you remember, brothers, our labor and our toil (he says) we work night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaim to you the gospel of God.*"

What's Paul saying? When we came to Thessalonica, we didn't just live off your offerings and stuff. We went and got a job. Paul was a tentmaker by trade, and so he would go into a community and find the local tent maker, and he'd get himself hired on to help make tents. And he would earn his own income while he was ministering so that the people to whom he was sharing the gospel were not burdened or that they didn't get the wrong idea that he was there just to get their money. Right?

You guys remember when Jesus sent out his disciples to minister in the nearby towns and villages? Let me read to you from Luke's gospel what he told them. He said,

Luke 10:3-4 (ESV)

Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves, Carry no moneybag...

Don't take a wallet. Don't take a man's purse. What was Jesus trying to communicate to his disciples? He was basically telling them that they were to trust the Lord for provision because that's genuine, true ministry. When the people who are out telling you to trust in God are trusting in God.

You know, Pastor Chuck used to say about these televangelists that were always asking people to send in money. He said, if they had so much faith about God's provision, they'd be sending you money. But did you notice they never do that? They never offer to send you anything. Where's their faith in God? Where's

their seed faith? You know? It's because it's greed that's going on. That's what's happening.

So, you know, watch out for any ministry where money is the focus. Watch out for any ministry where money is the constant topic from the pulpit. How much we need, and how much more you need to give. Watch out. That's just imbalanced. It's not the way it should be. The leaders should be trusting God, just like they're telling you to trust God.

Paul goes on to describe true and genuine ministry. Verse 6, he says, "*Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though (you know, he says) we could have made demands (on you) as apostles of Christ (because, you know, we have rights).*" ⁷ *But (he says, instead) we were gentle among you (and look at this), like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. (He said)* ⁸ *So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel (God) but (also) our very selves, because you had become very dear to us.*" And this is the next way to recognize true and genuine ministry.

Point 5:

Those in true leadership are there to serve — not be served.

Notice that Paul begins verse 6 by saying, we didn't seek glory from you. We didn't come in as the leaders who stand above the crowd. That wasn't our intention to come to you and talk about how great we were and to elevate ourselves above you. We came to get down on our knees and clean toilets, if that's what we had to do. We came to humble ourselves among you. I remember Jesus saying the same thing. He said,

Matthew 20:26b-28 (ESV)

"...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

That's true and genuine ministry when leaders are willing to serve. They're not there to be served, but they want to serve others. And did you notice that Paul likened his ministry? And this is bold. He likened his ministry to a nursing mother taking care of her children. I mean, I watched my wife with four kids and the incredible maternal protective instinct that is part of a mother's daily life watching over her children, every step, every move, caring and loving and protecting. It's just amazing. And Paul is kind of funny. He dares to identify

with that level of maternal love and protection as it relates to the ministry that he had to these people in Thessalonica.

And you know what's interesting about this? This argument—think about this—Paul's argument here, telling them, we loved you like a nursing mother. Don't you understand that would be pointless if it wasn't true? I mean, these people were there. They would have known if Paul was lying to them because they were the recipients of that ministry. So for Paul to say, we loved you like a nursing mother, they could either go, no, you didn't, or they could say, yeah, you're right. But either way, you make a statement that bold, people are either going to accept what you've said because it's true, or they're going to know that you're a liar. And so, you know, it's pointless to make this sort of statement if it's not real.

Verse 11, "*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.*" And by the way, this is the last way that Paul gives us here in these verses to recognize a true and genuine ministry of the Lord. He says that, like a father with his children, we did three things: we exhorted you, we encouraged you, we charged you. But why? Why? Why? Why did we do those things? That you might walk worthy of God. And this is number six. This is the last of the ways that we can recognize a true and genuine ministry.

Point 6:

The goal of a true and genuine ministry will always be to exhort, encourage and charge you to be Christ-like.

That's the goal. It's not to get you to give your money. It's not to get you to like me. It's to encourage you to become more Christlike, right? This is something Paul said often in his letters. He wrote to the Ephesians, he said,

Ephesians 4:1 (ESV)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

And then to the Philippians, he said,

Philippians 1:27 (ESV)

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...

What does it mean to live a life worthy? Worthy is one of those trigger words for a lot of people. I had a guy write me recently, and I think it was a lady, saying something about how, you know, am I ever going to be worthy? And I was like, no, no, I don't think you ever will be.

We're not, we don't come before the Father because we're worthy. We come before the Father because He made us worthy through Jesus Christ, His Son, who imputed to us His worthiness, right? So that's a different kind of worthy that we're talking about.

What we're talking about here is living differently. Living worthy of the kingdom of God means that your life displays a different manner, a different desire, a different goal than your neighbor who doesn't know God and doesn't walk with Jesus. Is your life different? If your life is different and it's following the guidelines of God's Word, and you're exuding the fruits of the Holy Spirit, then you're walking in a manner that is worthy of the kingdom of God.

If you're living exactly like the world, then you're walking in a way that is inconsistent with the kingdom of God. You see what Paul is saying here? So, he's not talking about living a perfect life. You know, it's not possible. He's talking about living in a way that's consistent with your new family identification. I mean, think of it that way. That's probably the best way to think about it. You probably look like your mother or father or an amalgamation of both.

Isn't it funny when you look at kids and you just go, you look just like your mom and your dad. And they're not even related, but you look just like both of them. I told my cousin that. Do you know, I saw my cousin when we were back in Minnesota. She's Sue's age, or maybe between Sue and I, and I hadn't seen her for, Sue, 25, 30 years— something like that, long time? She lives just near Omaha, Nebraska. And she came up to Minnesota where we were, but she looked just like her mom and dad – my aunt and uncle. And I knew her mom and dad very well. They're both, you know, passed away now. But I said to her, Julie, you look just like your mom and just like your dad. She was exhibiting the family likeness.

Now, as Christians, the Holy Spirit lives in us, and God is calling you and I to exhibit the family likeness. It's not what you see in a mirror, it's what you see here in the Word of God. That is what we are to exude. That is how we are to live. That is what we are to project: forgiveness, love, kindness, concern for others, patience, and all the other things that the Word of God speaks about. Those things are now possible because the Holy Spirit lives in you.

It's His power living in you, but you and I have to yield to that work of the Spirit, right? It doesn't just happen automatically. I wish it did. I wish we became Christians, and then we automatically just lived like Jesus without fail for the rest of our lives. Wouldn't that be glorious? You'd be shocked how many Christians think you ought to just automatically when you come to Jesus, and they write to me and they go, I came to Jesus, why am I still messing up? You know? As if there's supposed to be this instantaneous transformation of perfection. You know, it doesn't happen that way.

Our whole Christian life is learning to yield to the work of the Holy Spirit, learning to say no to Paul and yes to Jesus, you know. That's what Christianity is all about, and it's going to happen for the entirety of your walk with the Lord. And I dare say you'll never get it right.

A guy wrote me just yesterday, and he said, how can I master trusting in God? I said, well, if you can master it, you let me know because I want you to come and speak at my church. I don't know anybody who has mastered trusting in God completely, 100%. We go through our lives learning to do that day by day.

Paul ends this chapter by reminding them in these next verses that, you know, the opposition they've been experiencing from their own countrymen was really very much just like what was happening in Jerusalem and the persecution that the believing Jews were experiencing from those who had handed Jesus over to the Romans to be crucified.

And then he admits in verses 17 and 18, look at those verses with me. Paul admits there that he had sought to come to Thessalonica on several occasions. And he says, if you look at the end of verse 18, he says, “...*Satan hindered us.*” Did you see that? He said we really wanted to come. We tried coming repeatedly, but Satan hindered us.

Have you ever wondered how Paul knew that it was Satan who was hindering him and them from coming rather than just God standing in the way? Because God does stand in the way of some things that we do. You guys remember Acts chapter 16? Let me read this for you. This is very important, so pay attention. It says, this again, Luke is writing, and he's obviously not with them because this is one of the "they" passages. He says,

Acts 16:6 (ESV)

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come

up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Do you hear that? Twice in that section I read to you, it says, first of all, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go somewhere, and then it says, the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go into Bithynia. And so he tells us in this passage, there are times when God will stand in our way and keep us from going a particular direction because he knows best. He knows what's best, and his timing is best. So there are times when He'll say, no, not now, later, or no, not you, somebody else, or whatever the case might be.

But here in Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul attributes the inability to travel there and visit them to Satan. Now, this can be very challenging, you know, and you've probably wondered yourself many times. How can I know if I'm dealing with spiritual warfare or if I'm just dealing with a situation where God doesn't want me to do this, or something like that, you know? And I'll be honest with you, I think a lot of Christians are pretty quick to blame Satan when the Lord Himself may, in fact, be behind their challenges, you know?

It might be God. It might be God saying, actually, I've got something else for you to do. I've got a different direction for you to go. I don't want you to go that way because I want you to go over here. You don't really want to, so I'm going to put a block in front of you until you finally get tired of hitting your nose on the wall and you turn around and go the other way.

And we're all just railing against Satan, you know, and casting down demons and crud, you know, and there's all this stuff, and, you know, I cast you out in the name of, and it's God, you know. He's like, no, you can't go that way. And by the same token, I think that there are times when we waste our time getting mad at God when we ought to be busy doing spiritual warfare.

You know, and coming against, you know, the enemy who is truly standing in our way and keeping us from the will of the Lord. So, people ask, how do I know if it's God or Satan who's blocking my path? And you know what I tell them? Well, you're not going to find out by asking me. You're talking to the wrong person. I don't know. I'm struggling to find out that in my own life.

But you know what I've learned? I've learned there's no shortcut to finding out what's going on, what's really going on. It's only going to come through prayer, and probably intense times of prayer and fasting. You need to figure out why there's a blockade in your way and what to do about it. Whether to stand against the work of the enemy or to yield to the work of the Father, you got to pray.

You see, we don't want to do that. We want to call somebody and get some advice. What should I do? What do you think this is? Sorry, there's no shortcuts here. God wants you and I to get on our knees, to get on our face, and to seek Him for knowledge, insight, and understanding.

But that means that's going to be inconvenient. It might mean you have to skip a meal or two, or you might have to really devote some time and attention to prayer, and be patient, and wait on the Lord. We don't really like doing that, but God doesn't have a drive-up window for answers. There's no quick-release kind of situation involved in that.

And He wants you and me to persevere and come to Him, have a relationship with Him, and pray about things. Lord, what's going on here? What's happening in my life? What's happening in my family? What's going on? Is this the work of the enemy? Is this an attack of the enemy that you want me to stand against in prayer? Or is this something the Lord has put a block up here? And if so, I want to yield to your work, and if it's not you, I want to stand rigidly opposed to the work of the enemy. So, prayer, prayer is how we're going to do it. So.