

Text: I Thessalonians 2:1-6

Title: “Making a Lasting Impact”

INTRODUCTION

If you had a piece of paper in front of you I’m sure you would have no trouble writing the names of people you know have made a lasting impact on your life. The first person that comes to your mind may be a parent or a grandparent, a teacher or a coach, a boss or a mentor, a servant of God somewhere in the church you attended. But you know that your life is different today because their life intersected your life.

ILLUSTRATION – I think about John and Rene Harmon who were friends with my family when I was a boy. John was an Air Force master sergeant who worked on airplanes; Rene was a stay-at-home mom for their two children. They were strong believers and attended church each week. Often they invited my sister and me to spend the night with them on Saturday nights so we could go to church with them on Sunday morning. One summer they invited me to Vacation Bible School at their church. I went every day with them; it was the first time I remember hearing the Gospel and realizing that I needed a Savior. It was a few years later before I was saved, but they made a lasting impact upon my life. I wouldn’t be doing what I do today without people like that. I’m sure that you can think of people in your life who have made a lasting impact.

Open your Bibles please to I Thessalonians 2:1-6. Since I’m here with you in the Sanctuary service for the whole time, and not also preaching in the Great Room service, I’m taking a break from the Esther series and will return to that next week. In I Thessalonians 2 we read of a season in the life of the famous Apostle Paul where he determined to make a lasting impact in the ancient city of Thessalonica. Read text.

So Paul came to Thessalonica on what is called the “Second Missionary Journey.” You read about it in Acts 16-18. He proclaimed the Gospel, people were saved and a church was formed. But due to heavy opposition to the Gospel in Thessalonica, Paul and the missionary team had to leave town after only a few weeks, three months at the most. Later Paul sent two letters to the church, I and II Thessalonians in our NT, to encourage the church in proper belief and behavior, but also to defend his short ministry among them. So Paul is mentally retracing the steps with them of his life among them.

1 Thessalonians 2:1 - You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure.

The word for “failure” actually means “empty.” Many translations say “our visit was not in vain.” It wasn’t wasted time. Though he was with them just a short time, he made a lasting impact upon them.

ILLUSTRATION – Some of you have played golf, and if you have, you know it is one of the most frustrating games ever invented. I was thinking of this yesterday at our church golf tournament. The tiny area on the club face comes into contact with a tiny golf ball ... and who knows where it will go from there. The time that the ball is actually in contact with the club face is a fraction of a second,

but where that ball ends up going is determined by that short time when it is in contact with the golf club.

Parents, I think about the time that you have to make an impact on your child's destiny. Oh don't waste that time. Every hour, every day is precious. Time goes by so quickly.

So what follows is a great example for us as to how to make a lasting impact upon the people around us ... in our families, at our work, at the checkout stand ... wherever we come into contact with others. Making a lasting impact happens...

1. THROUGH THE PAIN OF ADVERSITY

Now this may surprise you, but just think about it. The people whom God has used and is using to be a blessing to others are most often people who have been broken by adversity or suffering in their life. Perhaps it's the brokenness of a critical illness or a divorce or a failed business venture or the loss of a child.

Paul knew the pain of adversity when he came to Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 2:2 - We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you His gospel in spite of strong opposition.

Before Paul and his team came to Thessalonica they first spent time in a city called Philippi. It was a fruitful ministry; many were saved, but there was also great opposition there. They were arrested, beaten and thrown in jail. And when they came to Thessalonica it happened again. The "strong opposition" Paul mentions here comes from religious people who were opposed to the message of the Gospel. Just about everywhere they went they suffered for the Gospel, but God still used them.

You see, being broken by adversity does something powerful for our ministry to others:

- **Keeps us humble toward ourselves.** If all we experience in life is success and popularity, then we can grow cocky and proud. Suffering humbles us. And the Bible says that God gives grace to the humble, and grace is essential to effectively impact the lives of others.
- **Makes us merciful toward others.** When you know how it feels to be broken, you can sympathize with the needs of others and have mercy on them. God is merciful to us and we learn how to show mercy to others in their trouble.
- **Makes us dependent upon God.** As we go through trials we cry out to God and our faith is increased, which is essential for any service we have for God and to others.

2 Corinthians 1:3 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

2 Corinthians 1:4 - who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

The people who are greatly used by God to impact others have all been hurt in some way. They understand what it means to have to depend on God. Handicaps don't limit our service; they enhance our service to others. Don't think because you've been broken by some adversity in your life that God can't use you.

Making a lasting impact also happens...

2. WITH THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL

There are many people who make an impact on our lives in different ways ... a professional mentor ... a school teacher ... a coach ... a parent. But no one makes a *lasting* impact on us like someone who shares the Gospel of Jesus Christ with us. That impact has eternal consequences. That was Paul's main purpose for going to Thessalonica in the first place.

1 Thessalonians 2:2b - With the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.

In spite of the opposition they were bold in speaking the Gospel.

1 Thessalonians 2:4a - On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.

It's not enough to get to know people. It's not enough to just help people with their problems. We haven't made a lasting impact on them until their need is connected to the resources of God, and that happens when we are faithful to tell them the Gospel ... that we cannot save or change ourselves ... we are lost and without hope apart from God in our lives ... God let His Son Jesus Christ take our sin upon Himself and He died for us on a Cross ... When we put our trust in Him our lives are forever changed. And this message must be told ... verbalized ... spoken to those who are far from God. That's when we make the ultimate lasting impact upon others.

Making a lasting impact also happens...

3. WITH A PATTERN OF INTEGRITY

People must not only hear the Gospel from us, but they need to see it in our lifestyle. Now think about this for a moment. Paul and Silas were in town perhaps only a few weeks, three months at the most. Then they had to leave abruptly. Their enemies tried to take full advantage of this to raise doubts about their sincerity and their motivation. Did they just come to get some money and move on? So Paul explains...

1 Thessalonians 2:3 - For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.

- "error" = we weren't trying to deceive or mislead you
- "impure motives" = there's nothing dirty in our motivation

- “trying to trick you” = we’re not con artists

1 Thessalonians 2:4a - On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

They have nothing to hide. They had been tested and proven authentic by God.

ILLUSTRATION – Several years ago I was in Guatemala for a short mission trip. Guatemala is known for its production of jade, a precious jewel. There were street vendors trying to get us to buy jade from them... for a very good price. But our host told us that we should not buy from them. There would be a better opportunity when we had some free time to visit an actual jade factory. Sure enough as we toured the jade factory a lady told us about how the jade was mined and why there were different colors of jade. Then she told us how to recognize true jade from “jaded jade.” True jade cannot be scratched with a piece of metal. Jaded jade can. And she had a piece of the false jade and scratched it with a pocketknife. Then she tried to scratch the real jade, and the knife could leave no mark.

Paul said, “We aren’t jaded jade. We’ve been tested and approved by the God who knows our hearts.”

1 Thessalonians 2:5 - You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.

- “flattery” = we weren’t just trying to butter you up to gain something from you or to manipulate you
- “masks to cover up greed” = we weren’t pretending to care when we actually just wanted to rip you off

Three times just in these verses Paul uses the words “you know.” In other words he had lived with such transparency that the people who knew him best knew he and his team came with integrity. They were there because they cared.

Making a lasting impact also happens...

4. FOR THE PLEASURE OF GOD

Note: We’re not talking about making a lasting *impression*; we’re talking about making a lasting *impact*. There’s a big difference. When we’re thinking about making a lasting impression we’re concerned with what others think of us. When we’re thinking about making a lasting impact we’re concerned with what God thinks about us. It is for His praise and for His pleasure. Back to...

1 Thessalonians 2:4 - On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

“We are not trying to please men...” Paul is saying, “What you think about me or my ministry isn’t as important as what God thinks.” We live for the pleasure and approval of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:6a - We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

This is critical because sometimes what pleases God is not what pleases people. And what pleases people may not please God. But if our main motivation in life, and in every relationship is to first please God, then the impact we leave on others will be a lasting impact.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION – On many occasions I heard my seminary professor and friend, Dr. Roy Fish, tell this story. There was a British pastor named Francis Dixon who was conducting a testimony service in a church in England when a man named Peter told his story. He said, “I was in the Royal Navy, walking down George Street in Sydney, Australia and out of nowhere stepped a gentleman and who said to me: ‘Excuse me, sir, but could I ask you a question? I hope that it won’t offend you, but if you were to die today, where would you spend eternity? The Bible says that it will either be in heaven or in hell. Would you think about that, please? Thank you. God bless you!’” The old man left but Peter couldn’t get that question out of his mind. When he returned home to England someone took him to church and he got saved.

Another time Francis Dixon was in a church service when a young man named Noel shared his story of how he came to know Christ: “I was in the Royal Navy and my ship was docked in Sydney, Australia. One evening I was walking down George Street when out of nowhere stepped a man. He said to me, “Young man, I have a question to ask you. If you should die tonight where would you spend eternity? Heaven or hell? It will be one or the other. Thank you and God bless you.” That brief encounter bothered Noel for many months. Finally he found a Christian who helped him give his life to Christ.

Not long afterwards, Francis Dixon was preaching in Adelaide, South Australia, when he decided to tell the story of Peter and Noel’s separate encounters with this man on George Street in Sydney, Australia. A man jumped up and said “I’m another! I’m another!” I was drawn to receive Christ the same way by the same man on George Street.

Just about everywhere Francis Dixon preached he heard similar reports. Then he was invited to preach in Sydney, Australia, and when he arrived there he wanted to find out more about this old man who was such a bold witness, so he asked someone in the church, “Who is this man who witnesses on George Street?” The church member said, “I know him. His name is Mr. Jenner. I can take you to meet him.”

Francis Dixon was taken to a humble little house, where he was introduced to Frank Jenner. As Francis related the stories of all the people who had shared how they came to Christ through Frank Jenner’s simple question, Frank began to weep. He said, “I’ve never heard that anyone I had spoken to had gone on for the Lord.” Mr. Jenner had done this for sixteen years and this was the first time he had heard of any lasting results.

Over the next few years Francis Dixon preached around the world and he told the Frank Jenner story from time to time. And often people came up to him and said, “I’m another. I was in Sydney,

Australia on George Street when a little old man approached me and said, ‘Excuse me, sir, but could I ask you a question? I hope that it won’t offend you, but if you were to die today, where would you spend eternity? The Bible says that it will either be in heaven or in hell. Would you think about that, please? Thank you. God bless you!’”

Now that’s a lasting impact. You may be young or old, educated or uneducated, a pastor or a bricklayer, a man or a woman. Through the pain of adversity, with the presentation of the Gospel, with a pattern of integrity and for the pleasure of God you can make a lasting impact.