

# CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY: DUCT TAPE DOESN'T FIX EVERYTHING

1 Thessalonians 5:14

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## INTRO

**OVERVIEW** – three categories that all of us can be and all of us need to be ready for.

- Warning the idle, encouraging the fainthearted, and helping the weak.
  - Someone who is 1) marching out of line, 2) losing heart, 3) losing strength.
    - 1) feeling hardened,                      2) feeling hopeless,                      3) feeling helpless
    - 1) sinning                                      2) struggling                                      3) sick
  - We should                      1) wake up,                      2) build up,                      3) lift up
    - 1) mobilize,                                      2) motivate,                                      3) mature
    - 1) speak clear warnings to those heading towards danger
    - 2) shower hope-filled promises to those in despair
    - 3) supply meaningful support to those out of their depth
- People are too complex to be all one or the other. We constantly change and overlap.

**TARGET** – aiming at everyone

- “I don’t have this much responsibility”
  - There are specific places in the Bible that are uniquely aimed and weighty for a certain demographic, but 1 Thess. 5:26-27 clues us in that these commands and principles are relevant and important for us all. This isn’t just for pastors and certified counselors, this is for us.
  - Some may explain that verses 12-13 are more aimed at the congregation, while verses 14-15 are more aimed at the leaders. The thinking is that the leaders may have come down too harshly on those who were being idle in the church, and their lack of tactfulness may have had people in the church resisting submission and failing to respect those who were working hard on their behalf. So, in light of that, Paul may be reminding the leaders to be tactful and considerate in how they are leading. But, ultimately, it’s hard to brush off this responsibility because it’s addressed to the “brothers”, which is typical for the broader congregation.
- “I don’t have this ability”
  - Paul is likely writing to people who are mostly lower-class Christians economically (1 Thess. 2:9). The people Paul is pressing this responsibility on are people who don’t have much financial freedom. We would wrongly conclude that Paul is only writing to people who don’t have to worry about the burden of working to pay the bills and provide for their family. This isn’t only for people who don’t have occupations that steal much of their daily thought and energy—people who have little worries and responsibilities and therefore can love and support others with ease.

- Paul has an understanding of *real* life, and yet he calls us to what is the norm of a gospel-transformed life—sacrificial love and care for others. Paul is talking to people like us, who have legitimate and real responsibilities but who believe in a glorious and real gospel that compels us and pushes us towards others *in the midst of our own struggles*. Paul’s exemplified this for 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 proclaimed to you the gospel of God.”
- Fight your flesh that is going to say you don’t have the ability or the responsibility. God is saying you can, and you should.

### **IMPORTANCE** – using the right tool

- Care for people with the right tool, and don’t give up or hide from those who don’t work with your tool set. The goal is that we would add to our toolkit so each of us can minister to various people in various seasons of life.
  - We need to be careful because the reason some of us are only carrying a single tool, is because that’s what you’re comfortable with and has been helpful for you. And, in one sense, it *is* helpful to care for people by considering what has been helpful for you, but in another sense, it’s not. It’s possible to take the golden rule too far—sometimes people don’t want to be treated the way you want to be treated. You might spot someone going through the same situation as you, yet they may be bringing a whole different context in that situation than you did. So, what was most helpful for you might not be most helpful for them.
  - In a diverse body, God is going to bring people in your life where it will be beneficial to think outside of what has typically helped you. People are complex, not just as individuals, but even from person to person. So, we have to realize that just because a certain word is what helped me in one instance, we need to be freed from projecting ourselves onto others and seeing everyone as a clone of ourself. This passage can become a helpful grid, so we can look through the lens of Scripture, not just our own experience, to decide how to treat people.
  - We’ve all been ministered to in multiple ways, and you surely appreciated the times when you felt like God and others understood what was really going on in your life and appropriately applied grace to you in your need.

### **SKILLS** – the twofold benefit is being equipped to minister to yourself and others.

- There are ways that God wants to speak to you and ways he wants you to speak to others. Being good at diagnosing where someone is coming from can help us channel grace in the right places—not just in our own life, but in others’ lives.

### **CONTEXT**

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

- Verse 9 is motivation because of our unshakable salvation
- Verse 11 is motivation through communal, progressive sanctification
- These are the theological foundations that free us and drive us to minister.

- Everything isn't on the line and determined by the way we minister. God is the key factor in people's sanctification. We can make mistakes, and yet God will uphold his promise.
- It's communal, not just person sanctification: if we're going to have a life that's whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully-trusting, we need each other to keep our heart, eyes, and trust, in one place. In some ways, *personal* sanctification is *impossible* sanctification.
- It's also progressive, not instantaneous sanctification: our attitude should change, knowing that a plant doesn't grow in one day. Encourage those who are growing, don't simply guilt them in the areas they haven't attained yet. There should be an understanding of what steps they have been taking in the Christian life so you can appropriately encourage the next steps to take.
- The body motivates sanctification primarily through encouragement, not guilt. Some of us may be exhausted from an overuse of guilt as the means for obedience. Can I encourage you on this basis—Christ has bore your guilt and you are doing well. In light of Christ's finished and certain work in your life: keep going. I'm here to continue ministering the grace that has already been evident in your life. Just as you are doing, do so more and more.

### **ADMONISH THE IDLE**

- Idleness is the specific example in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.
- Luke 7:6-8 is the general principle. Submitting under an authority, not stepping out of line.
- Diagnostic questions:
  - 1) Does their level of guilt grow with their level of clarity?
  - 2) How much harm is being caused by their actions?
- Misconceptions about warning others:
  - It doesn't need to be overly harsh or accusatory. Penetrating questions can be an effective way to bring an issue to the surface and apply appropriate guilt. Sin is sometimes compared to being asleep; we sin when we don't think through the implications. Sometimes all it takes is a simple comment or question to bring clarity to those implications.
  - We have to be balanced and careful to express our love (i.e. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11).
    - Paul wants to be careful that our warnings actually encourage a believer to come back into the Body, not isolate them further. That's why there needed to be a follow-up of forgiveness and affirmations of love, lest Satan capitalizes on the repentant believer.

### **ENCOURAGE THE FAINTHEARTED**

- It's not just for the people with the gift of encouragement to do the encouraging.
- What Paul may have had in mind for the Thessalonians are the "small-souled" Christians whose courage is wavering in the face of persecution.
- What they need isn't a shallow cliché, or someone to gas them up. They need to be showered with hope-filled promises. Because the resolve we have at our core strongly relates to our faith in the unshakable realities and promises of God.
  - "Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your work is not in vain in the Lord" (2 Corinthians 15).
  - Hebrews 6:13-20... Do you know how great of an encouragement it is that God cannot lie!? We go through life feeling like things are just happening and we've forgotten the glorious, unchanging realities

that are at play in all of our changes. Life isn't just happening. God's promises are being brought to fruition!

- Diagnostic questions:
  - How clearly do they *see* God's hand in their situation?
  - How much of God's goodness and greatness do they *feel* in this instance?
    - Where is God going with my life? And where is his glory "missing" in my life?

## HELP THE WEAK

- "Help" is a hard word to distinguish from the first two because "warning" and "encouraging" are a form of help. But in the first two instances, I think it's more likely that you are speaking into someone's situation, whereas this third kind of help is about stepping into someone's situation. There's an elevated need for presence and sharing part of yourself to spread out the burden they are struggling with on their own.
- This might be referring to a spiritual weakness or a physical/situational disadvantage. Either way, help is needed—not a pat on the back but a shoulder to lean on, not a flip of a switch but an ongoing source of strength.
  - We need to think of people who are weak like someone who has been bedridden. Someone who has been bedridden doesn't need someone to push them out of bed, and they don't just need a pep talk about how great it will be to walk again. They need someone to stand by their side as their legs regain strength, as muscle develops again, as coordination comes back, as they slowly take one step at a time. We have to stop aiming for that one word that'll fix everything. Biblical counseling and congregation ministry is not about having the ability to do a spiritual mic drop and walk away. It's about being able to bear each other burdens and build each other up until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
- Jesus' example:
  - All of you who are tired and heavy laden, come to me and I will give you *rest*. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.  
he is there carrying the weight with you.
  - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.  
he is near to our weaknesses and provides grace that helps in our time of need.
- Diagnostic questions:
  - Are they unsuccessfully struggling?
  - Do they need help tapping into avenues of grace?

## BE PATIENT WITH THEM ALL

- If we can master this one, it can pay dividends in any kind of person-to-person ministry.
- Warning: it can be dangerous to have people with high standards coupled with little patience.
  - God is the epitome—the example—of having a high and holy standard and yet an unbelievable amount of patience towards those who rebel over & over again. We spit in the face of his goodness, yet he remains faithful (i.e. Nehemiah 9:6-31)

- If we want to reflect God’s patience, and we want to care for the person more than the problem and their soul more than the situation, than we need to have patience. We need love that covers a multitude of sins. And we need to check ourselves—whether we are wrongly justifying our attempts at a quick fix.
  - A quick fix might be backed by a legitimate, strong passion for what’s best. But we need to probe whether or not those quick fixes are actually tainted by self-love, a love for control, a reliance on the flesh, or even a dismissal of passages like this that call us to reflect God through our forbearance and patience.
- He that answers before he hears a matter, it is a folly and shame.
  - A hard place to do that is social media. All it takes is a sentence and we can be ready to go off on someone, without even coming close to figuring out where they are coming from, and thinking through the lens of Scripture concerning what they need most.
  - Consider YouTube: we can hardly bare sitting through 5 seconds of an ad before we watch a video. And we can easily make people feel like those ads, giving the impression we don’t want to hear what they’re going through because we need to get back to my video/my busy life.
    - But if you want to hear what’s actually going on in someone’s life, down to the level of what’s going on in their heart, we can’t be distracted, we can’t click skip. We have to be patient. We have to sit there and slowly probe and grow in our knowledge of others if we desire to have a positive impact on their life.
- How else are we going to be able to accurately identify people’s needs? We need patience.
- How else are we going to effectively minister in a way that a person needs? We need patience.
- How else are you going to avoid frustration/give up when he/she doesn’t immediately change? They need someone to show them patience, just like you need patience.
- It is so freeing to get to the place where we understand patience is a necessity. The whole concept of progressive sanctification assumes the ongoing need for patience.
  - This grid isn’t ultimately restricting; it’s freeing—freeing us from our tiny tool box and freeing us to care for people in a meaningful way.

## CONCLUSION

- The heart of this message is that we would be equipped to care for people in a way that considers both what God has said and where people are at.
- God knows exactly who we are and where we are coming from. And he is more than equipped to minister to us in our need. As we grow in our understanding of ourselves, we can be more quick to go to the places where God has already spoken profoundly and specifically to our needs.
- There is a surprising thing that happens when we minister to each other: we actually don’t weigh each other down, we build each other up—higher than any of us could have gotten on our own.