

1 Thessalonians 2:1–20 | “Being a Deeper Community, Part 1”

October 13, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 2 this morning. *[pauseeee]*

I want you to imagine two men, who have gone to the same church together for 30 years. [pause]

Let’s just name them Randy and Jim. *[pause]*

They have sat near each other for 30 years in church.

They have both experienced the changes in the church over the years, have seen each other grow old, and witnessed each other’s children grow up and move out of the home. *[pause]*

Every time that they see each other when they attend church, they always greet each other with a smile. [pause]

They converse with some small talk—talking about sports, the weather, changes in the community, and things like that.

Yet here they are after 30 years, and their relationship has never gone deeper. [pause]

They may have known each other for 30 long years, but their relationship is only 3 inches deep. *[pause]*

They know each other, but don’t truly know each other. [pause]

They each could have grown more in their spiritual walk through the help of the other one, but thought that they could be a Christian lone ranger.

And as a result, they have each faced their own trials and struggles alone, when they could have been a tremendous help to each other. [pauseeeee]

One day, Jim was laying on his deathbed, and Randy stopped by.

But Randy didn’t know what to say at this point, for their relationship had never gotten that deep. [pause]

As Randy thought about what to say, the only things that raced through his mind were all of the surface-level talk that they had through the years. *[pause]*

Since they had never really gotten close, this bedside visit felt odd.

It was a time to *be* close, but their friendship *wasn’t* close, so going deeper right then felt awkward—they’ve never done that before. *[pause]*

They had never pried into each other’s hearts, grew strong in their friendship, and helped each other through their struggles. [pauseeee]

As Randy sat there considering all of this, he was struck with the fact that this may be the last time that he sees Jim, and yet 30 years were wasted on peripheral things. *[pause]*

They could have been like iron sharpening iron,¹ yet their relationship wasn't strong, so they never sharpened each other. *[pauseeee]*

And Randy thought, "I wish I could go back..."

...I wish I would have gotten to know Jim more, gone deeper with him, and been more of a spiritual help to him through the years." *[pauseeeee]*

That's such a sad scenario, isn't it? *[pause]*

Here are two guys, who could have been such deep, close friends that helped, encouraged, and strengthened each other in the faith. *[pause]*

I mean they were prime candidates for a deep, close, iron-sharpening-iron friendship, yet it never happened...

Their relationship was friendly, but not deep, nor close. *[pauseeee]*

Do we really want to end up like Jim and Randy, or do we long for something more? *[pause]*

I, for one, long for our church relationships to be more than that...

To be more than just shallow or even average depth with one another, but to be close and deep and affectionate. *[pause]*

To be relationships where we help each other grow, encourage one another through thick and thin, and stir one another up to love and good works.² *[pause]*

To be relationships that don't merely feel like acquaintances or co-workers, but relationships that truly feel like *family*. *[pauseeee]*

Now this isn't only me calling us to this kind of deepness in our relationships, for I call all of us to this, since the Bible calls us to deep relationships. *[pauseeee]*

I know that you, too, want deeper relationships. *[pause]*

According to our recent survey, 92% of you desire to have deeper relationships with others in the church.

Yet although almost all of us want deeper relationships, 92% of us feel like our relationships with others are only *average* in depth. *[pause]*

¹ A reference to Proverbs 27:17.

² A reference to Hebrews 10:24.

So we desire to have deep relationships, but we don't feel like we have them here. *[pauseeee]*

That's actually a good place to be in, for we have the desire, and now we are looking to God's Word to help us get there.

So let's be open to letting the Word mold and change us today. *[pauseeee]*

For the next two weeks, I want to look at and expound upon two (of the many) passages that will help us to go deeper with one another.

And the first one we see today is found in 1 Thessalonians 2, so let's READ it. *[READ]*

I know that there's a lot in this passage, but I want us to focus on what we see about how our relationships with one another are to be. *[pauseeee]*

Paul is speaking on behalf of himself and his fellow co-laborers, and he describes their relationship with the Thessalonians.

And one thing that we see is that...

I. Our relationships are to be Bible-infused.

If someone overheard all of your conversations with other Christians, would there be any difference between your conversation and the conversations of those who don't know Christ? *[pause]*

Sadly, many times our Christian relationships are devoid of the Word of God. *[pause]*

This ought not to be! We are to be people of the Word! *[pause]*

Christian relationships are not to be like secular relationships.

Rather, our talk must be governed by and permeated with Scripture. *[pauseeee]*

If all of our talk with other believers is only and ever about the things of this world, there is something wrong. *[pause]*

Paul's example here shows us that Christian relationships are Word-speaking relationships.

And the truth is that we can't go deeper *without* God's Word. *[pauseeee]*

Paul shows us someone who boldly spoke the Word of God, even amidst hardship.

In verse 2, he explains that even though he faced great conflict and suffering, he still spoke God's Word. *[pause]*

Hardship didn't restrain Paul's Bible-speaking. *[pause]*

Paul knew that the Bible and the Gospel were so vital, so important to others, that it must be spoken even amidst great hardship. *[pauseeee]*

Do we have the same kind of mindset?...

That no matter what hardship we face, no matter what criticism we receive for speaking the Word, we *will* speak God's Word to others. *[pauese]*

Sometimes speaking God's Word will be speaking it through hardship. *[pause]*

Other people may not like that you are sharing God's Word with somebody else, but will you still see it as worth it? *[pause]*

Maybe the criticism will come from that other person's friends or co-workers.

They say, "How could you listen to that Bible stuff? It's so outdated and bad advice!" *[pause]*

Will that deter you from speaking the truth, or will you boldly be willing to face criticism and antagonism, for you know the value of God's Word? *[pauseeee]*

Paul even makes it clear that doing this is never in vain! *[pause]*

God calls us to be faithful and to boldly share His Word, and He will do what He does!

His Word never returns void!³

So be willing to speak the Word of God faithfully and boldly in other people's lives, knowing that God's Word will do what it needs to do.

You can count on that! *[pauseeee]*

You may not always see what it's doing in that person's life, but God is at work, using His Word to mold and change people into the image of Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Like Paul, we speak God's Word boldly and faithfully, but we do so with genuine, pure, and God-honoring motives. *[pauese]*

Paul emphasizes in this chapter that he and his co-laborers spoke God's Word accurately and did so in order to please God. *[pause]*

They didn't use deception.

They didn't people-please or use flattery.

They conducted themselves *rightly* among the Thessalonians. *[pause]*

³ A reference to Isaiah 55:11.

All that they did was for the glory of God, and not for the glory of man—God was witness to this. *[pauseeee]*

How do you talk and relate to others? In genuine, God-honoring ways? *[pause]*

This will make a huge difference in the health and depth of your relationships.

Because if you use deception, you will only decimate trust. *[pause]*

Would you want to be close to someone, who tried to deceive you?

Of course not! They tried to hurt you, not help you. *[pauseeee]*

We also don't use words of flattery, or try to people-please. *[pause]*

If you simply seek to please people or use flattery, you may make many friends up front, but it's not pleasing to God, and will be eventually found out. *[pause]*

Would you become close to someone, who spoke words of flattery all the time, and you found out what they were doing?

No, because words of flattery often show someone not being genuine. *[pause]*

We don't want to become close to ingenuine people, but we want to get to know people who desire to show the real them, and who want to know the real us. *[pauseeeee]*

Your friendships can't go to the depth that they should, if you are only riding on the coattails of flattery.

And the reason is because you are just using fake, flowery words, and not building upon anything real. *[pauseeee]*

You must be willing to speak what people *need* to hear, not simply what they *want* to hear. *[pause]*

They need God-honoring truth above all!

So that's why Paul exhorted, encouraged, and charged the Thessalonians to walk in a manner worthy of God. *[pauseeee]*

As people of the Word, what happens when we see that people are willing to speak the truth in love towards us, even when it's hard? *[pause]*

It draws us closer to them, for we see that they truly care, and they are simply using God's Word to help us.

And we see that they care so much that they are willing to face possible rejection, in order to help us. *[pauseeee]*

When you tie this genuine, Bible-infused speech with godly conduct towards others, it's a match made for deep, thriving relationships. *[pause]*

What Christian wouldn't want to be close to someone like that? *[pause]*

What Christian wouldn't want that kind of relationship? *[pauseeee]*

So what will make our relationships go deeper?

When our conversations are Bible-infused and genuine. *[pauseeee]*

You can't go deeper *without* God's Word. *[pause]*

God's Word allows our relationships to go deeper than they ever could without it, for we are speaking God's truth and so united around God and His Word. *[pause]*

It helps us to grow into people, who walk worthy of the Lord.

It promotes trust, for we do so in genuineness.

So we boldly and accurately speak Scripture into each other's lives, knowing that it is not in vain, for God's Word will do what God wants it to do. *[pauseeeee]*

Do you speak God's Word into other people's lives? *[pause]*

This could look like encouraging someone with Scripture when they are discouraged. *[pause]*

It could mean that you share with them what you have been learning recently in your devotions. *[pause]*

This could look like discussing something from the sermon, saying, "Wow, I never really thought about that point that the pastor made. What do you think?" *[pauseeee]*

This kind of talk, using the Word of God, deepens our relationships because it starts to open up our hearts. *[pause]*

As people share with us, we begin to share more of our life and what we have been learning in God's Word. *[pauseeee]*

You have been entrusted with God's Word, but do you speak it? *[pause]*

Remember that it doesn't return void, it really and truly *is* the word of God, and it works in us.

So speak it boldly, accurately, and genuinely into the lives of other people, all for the glory of God. *[pause]*

When you do this regularly with other people, just watch God deepen your relationships. *[pauseeee]*

From 1 Thessalonians 2, we see that our relationships are to be Bible-infused, but also that...

II. Our relationships are to be loving and close.

If you had to count how many close relationships you had with others in this church, how many would there be? *[pausee]*

Sadly, many of us are missing out on loving and close, Jonathan-and-David-like relationships.

Yet when you read 1 Thessalonians 2, you can't help but notice Paul's loving and close relationship with the Thessalonians. *[pauseee]*

One thing that you see is that Paul is lovingly sacrificial. [pause]

He is so loving that He's willing to boldly speak God's Word to them amidst suffering.

But he's also so lovingly sacrificial that he was willing to make sure that he wasn't a burden to any of them...

He worked hard night and day for this. *[pauseeee]*

A key to deep relationships is loving sacrifice! [pause]

When we see someone lovingly sacrifice for us, there's something in that that draws our hearts to them...

Loving sacrifice is like a magnet that draws us together. [pause]

We see their love on display, and it makes us want to do something for them in return, out of love. *[pauseeeee]*

Sometimes we just want our relationships to magically go deeper at the snap of our finger, but it doesn't work that way.

Rather, it takes the time and effort of loving sacrifice for others. *[pause]*

Loving act after loving act is like a building being built up—slowly, yet steadily and strongly it creates a deep, close, and strong relationship that doesn't fall like a house of cards at any passing wind of hardship. [pauseeeee]

Do you want deep relationships?

You cannot do it without loving sacrifice for one another. [pause]

Relationships are made deep in the deep well of love. *[pause]*

Love unites, binds, strengthens, and builds up a relationship.

That's what happened with Paul, his co-laborers, and the Thessalonians! *[pauseeeee]*

Look further to the love of Paul...

He states in verse 7, “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.” *[pause]*

He actually likens himself to a nursing mother in his care for them!

He was gentle with others, taking them where they are at and helping them to grow. *[pause]*

We aren't to be mean about things, saying, “Come on, just get this!”

No, we aren't unkind and harsh with others, but bear with them. *[pauseeee]*

Are you gentle with others in love? *[pause]*

No one wants to get closer to somebody who is harsh and rough with them, but they are drawn close to those who treat them gently. *[pause]*

In fact, Paul even goes further, likening himself not only to a nursing mother, but also to an instructing father. *[pause]*

In verses 11–12, he talks about how he was like a father: exhorting, encouraging, and charging them to walk in a manner worthy of God. *[pauseeee]*

With this image of a nursing mother and an instructing father, Paul was showing how he handled himself with the Thessalonians...

He was gentle, yet instructive.

He was tender with them, yet challenged them, too. *[pauseeee]*

This is how our relationships are to be in the church...

We are to be gentle and tender with others, but we should also want to see them grow, so there are times when we need to exhort and challenge one another. *[pause]*

This balance helps grow and deepen our relationships, as others see our heart for them. *[pause]*

They see that we aren't out to get them and are harsh about it all, yet they also see that we care enough about them to want them to grow in their walk with the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

Do you show gentleness, kindness, and tenderness in your relationships? *[pause]*

If you are only harsh and rough with people, it's not going to create deepening relationships.

But are you willing to exhort, encourage, and challenge others in their walk with the Lord, too? *[pauseeee]*

Iron sharpens iron, but to do so, we must challenge others at times. *[pause]*

So often we are too fearful of how someone will react to our loving rebuke of what they are doing that we don't speak up when they really need us to.

Yet Proverbs says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy."⁴
[pause]

We should want them to grow to follow the Lord more and more. [pauseeeee]

Our relationships can be loving, close, and deep like a family—that's how Paul related to the Thessalonians. [pauseeeee]

Do your relationships with others in this church look like family relationships? [pause]

Sadly, that's not always the case, but rather, our relationships often look like acquaintances or shallow friendships.

But just listen to how Paul talks to these people in verse 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." [pauseeeee]

Would you ever use those words for another person in this room, who is not a part of your physical family? [pause]

If not, that just shows that there's something missing in our relationships that is hindering us from going deeper with one another! [pauseeee]

Paul says that he and his co-laborers were "affectionately desirous" of the Thessalonians.
[pause]

They had such heartfelt affection and love, such a strong yearning and longing for these people that they couldn't help but share the gospel and their very selves with them. [pause]

Truly, the Thessalonians "had become very dear to [them]". [pauseeeee]

Are the people in this room very dear to you? [pause]

Do you truly love them deeply that you have a strong longing to be with them, a strong yearning to talk about God's Word, and to share your very self with them? [pauseeee]

So often we are guarded with sharing our life with others, yet Paul was willing to share himself with others. [pause]

This takes risk, for when you open up yourself and your heart to others, for you could get hurt.

Yet love is willing to take that risk. [pauseeee]

⁴ Proverbs 27:6.

Listen to me, for this is so very important—if you don't share your very self with others, your relationships will *never* go as deep as they should. *[pause]*

If you do not open up yourself and share yourself with others, your relationships will always and ever be shallow. *[pause]*

We must be willing to put ourselves out there in love, and when we see others do this towards us, we must reciprocate.

And we must be willing to be gentle, tender, forgiving, and loving with others when they do so. *[pause]*

When people know that if they open up, they will not be met with disgust or faces or awkwardness, but with love and kindness, they are more open to do so.

So how do you respond to those who begin to open up themselves to you? *[pauseeee]*

First Baptist, let's begin sharing our own selves with one other! *[pause]*

Let's share our joys and delights, our burdens and struggles, and everything in between.

Let's not walk around with fences and walls around us, but let's open the door, and let love flow between us. *[pauseeee]*

This love leads to great desire and longing when we are apart from one another, so that we eagerly desire to see each other face-to-face. *[pause]*

Do you ever feel that way with the people here?...

That when you don't see each other for a while, you can't wait to be back with the people of God? *[pauseeee]*

I remember back when we were apart for a bit during the beginning of COVID, and I just couldn't wait to get back and see you all. *[pause]*

When we were apart, there was something missing, and it was hard. *[pause]*

That's what it should be like for each of us with each other! *[pause]*

Yet this kind of love is so deep that even when we are apart, our hearts are so bound together that even distance can't rend our hearts apart. *[pauseeee]*

What great joy that this can bring to our relationships! *[pause]*

In fact, it's joy that Paul talks about in verses 19–20...

“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.” *[pause]*

Paul found great joy in the Thessalonians, and how he got to play a part in their walk with the Lord. *[pause]*

When you see someone grow in their faith and you get to play a part in that—what a joy!

What a thing to rejoice in, and someday we can stand before Christ joyfully boasting in the life of the people that we have invested in. *[pauseeee]*

We are to have deep relationships with others in the church.

Paul and his relationship with the Thessalonians shows us this truth...

Deepness can and should be a reality in our relationships with one another. *[pause]*

Together we can be deeply rooted in the Word of God, as we speak it into each other's lives, and we can be deeply affectionate with one another. *[pause]*

This is possible!

And when we don't go deep with others in the church, we are missing out on something that can help us to grow, be encouraged, and give us great joy. *[pause]*

These things are possible, for Christ has died for our sins and rose again, uniting us by His shed blood. *[pauseeee]*

Remember Randy and Jim, the men who I talked about at the beginning? *[pause]*

Let's reimagine their relationship and what it would look like, if it was deep instead of shallow. *[pause]*

Jim and Randy have gone to church together for 30 years and have sat near each other every week.

But in this scenario, they are close and loving friends. *[pause]*

They have been there when each other needed it. *[pause]*

When Jim's marriage was struggling, Randy met with him weekly to help him through it, and this played a big part as to why things turned around in his marriage. *[pause]*

One time, when Randy was injured for a month, Jim would call him every other day to encourage him, and share a Bible verse with him...

That really uplifted Randy and helped him through it. *[pause]*

They would also meet up monthly for breakfast and check in on how each other was doing. *[pause]*

They would share their struggles and burdens, but also their joys. *[pause]*

When they sinned against each other, apologies were made, and forgiveness was readily extended. *[pause]*

Through ups and downs, they were there for each other.

And now as Randy visits Jim on his deathbed, it's completely different than the other scenario. *[pausee]*

Their relationship has grown deep, so Randy knows exactly the kinds of things that Jim would need to hear, and he's there for him. *[pause]*

Jim is encouraged by the Scripture that Randy recites...

...And the conversation they have and the prayer that Randy gives is so deep and meaningful, for it is simply the outworking of their deep, solid relationship that has built through the years. *[pausee]*

Jim finishes his race of faith well, helped on by Randy at his side.

And they look forward to that day when they will see each other again in Glory. *[pauseeee]*

What a difference that a deep relationship can have! *[pause]*

That kind of relationship is possible with others here in this church—so follow Paul's example, rely on the Spirit's power, and strive for it! *[pause]*

May our relationships be Bible-infused, and loving and close. *[pause]*

Let's pursue this, and see what God will do in our relationships with each other here at First Baptist.